'COYOTE VS. ACME' AND THE BATTLE TO WIN ITS THEATRICAL RELEASE

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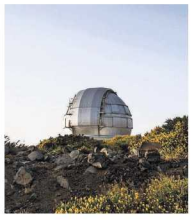

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The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION | SATURDAY-SUNDAY, AUGUST 29-30, 2026

The perils of a Saudi nuclear deal

W.J. Hennigan

OPINION

The most significant nuclear development in the Middle East in a generation now sits in the hands of Congress.

The Trump administration this past week presented its nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia to lawmakers for review, opening the door for the kingdom to enrich its own reactor fuel.

President Trump has not publicly released the complete text of the deal, so it's difficult to assess whether it aligns with American security interests. Unquestionably, the most provocative aspect is the prospect of enrichment — even if for peaceful purposes at the outset — because it could hand Saudi Arabia the technical means to pursue a nuclear device.

Congress should stop the president's dangerous nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia.

If it does go through, the accord could trigger a cascading effect across the region that culminates in a dangerous arms race. Washington should expect partners like the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Turkey to demand similar terms for programs of their own, threatening to reverse decades of U.S. nonproliferation efforts.

It now falls to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee to stop that from happening. Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act requires the committees to review such accords, colloquially called 123 Agreements. Congress then decides whether to let a deal proceed or reject it within 90 days while in session to halt it from moving forward.

Lawmakers should say no to this one.

Not only does the prospective deal complicate relationships with allies, it also brings the most elusive goal of the president's war with Iran to the fore: a decisive resolution of Tehran's nuclear program and retrieving all its highly enriched uranium. If Iran's pathway to the bomb is not cut off completely, Saudi Arabia, its archrival, would be even more certain to develop a weapons program of its own, making the nuclear

HENNIGAN, PAGE 10

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.

ATUL LOKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'They all died, and I lived'

Survivors are left in stunned disbelief after flash floods killed hundreds and erased miles of roads and bridges in the Rasuwa district of Nepal. *PAGE 3*

Iranians losing hope six months into war

As economic crisis builds and regime tightens grip, cynicism about U.S. grows

BY LEILY NIKOUNAZAR AND YEGANEH TORBATI

When the United States and Israel rained down missiles and bombs on Iran to start their war on Feb. 28, there were some Iranians who, within a swirl of conflicting emotions, saw in the destruction something unexpected: hope.

"The one thing I'm certain about is that I wasn't sad," said Negar, a 35-year-old lawyer, describing feelings that were echoed by other Iranians interviewed via voice memos and text messages. "There was anxiety. There was worry. But there was no grief when the war began."

Six months later, the hope that Negar and other Iranians had that the war might presage a better future is largely gone, replaced with gnawing worries about the future, cynicism about the intentions of the United States and growing desperation from living in a failing economy.

The New York Times has regularly spoken with Iranians throughout the war, and not everyone was as hopeful as Negar and other critics of the government. Many Iranians support the system and have stood behind it, or opposed both the government and the idea that it could be swept away through military force.

But whether they initially welcomed the U.S.-Israeli military campaign or not, many Iranians say they no longer think that the government is set to crumble and are more focused on surviving an enduring economic crisis that the conflict has made much worse.

"I can't even begin to describe the level of anxiety we have about the future and what's going to happen," said Negar, who, like everyone else interviewed for this article, spoke on the condition that her last name not be used for fear of retribution from the government.

Fahimeh, 43, a former model living in Tehran, said hopelessness had taken over. "I'm not waiting for anything anymore," she said. "I've stopped trying to move forward and have switched to simply trying to survive."

For some Iranians, President Trump's erratic policymaking has been an inflection point. After the United States failed to achieve its stated goals, including preventing Iran from obtaining a nucle-

IRAN, PAGE 4

Black market for Canadian cars

Vehicles 'stolen to order' as Western export bans fuel demand in Russia

BY JANE BRADLEY AND MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

A yearslong car theft epidemic in Canada has gotten so bad that despite a police crackdown, thieves break into homes just to steal car keys. Thousands of cars vanish each year.

The phenomenon, records and interviews show, is driven in part by an unexpected source: a booming black market for Western vehicles in wartime Russia.

While Western export bans have severed Russia from much of the auto market, they have not tempered the demand for brand-name SUVs and trucks. That has given rise to a sophisticated network of criminals that steals cars, hides them in shipping containers and sends them to Russia, often by way of the Middle East.

NADUNA STUART-ULIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Frédéric Bonsaint, an officer at the Canada Border Services Agency, inspecting a stolen vehicle that was found inside a shipping container at a port in Montreal.

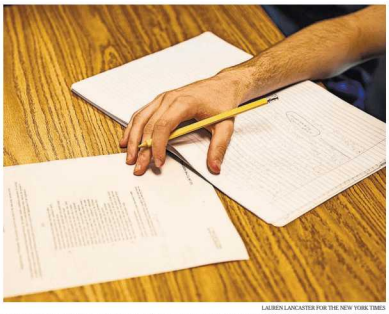
"A forbidden fruit is always sweet," Daniil Aleynik, a Russian national, said during an interview from a Ukrainian jail, where he was being held on charges of participating in an international car theft scheme. "There are a lot of cars in Canada, and stealing them there is very convenient."

Interpol, the international police organization, received 4,798 reports that stolen Canadian vehicles had been found in Russia from February 2024 to July 2026, according to data obtained by The New York Times and confirmed by two law enforcement officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because it is considered sensitive.

Pickup trucks like Dodge Rams, Toyota Tundras and Ford F-150s are in particularly high demand.

CANADA, PAGE 5

What students forfeit when A.I. does the writing



LAUREN LANCASTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

To avoid A.I. misuse, Jessica Binney, a teacher, moved much of the essay writing for her Advanced Placement English course to in-class work using pen and paper, above.

The ubiquity of chatbots threatens a craft that sharpens critical thinking

BY DANA GOLDSTEIN

After years of studying how human beings write, the cognitive psychologist Ronald T. Kellogg concluded that drafting a basic persuasive essay was as mentally taxing as digging a ditch was physically exhausting.

Writing well requires a command of vocabulary, spelling and grammar. It forces writers to comprehend a subject, to sift through their working memory of that topic, to organize and plan. Writing an essay is so difficult that a person in the throes of it can do hardly anything else — as anyone who has shushed a spouse or child while trying to compose a decent sentence can attest.

Very few people would volunteer to dig a ditch. Likewise, it is hard — almost impossible, many English teachers will admit — to turn a reluctant writer into an enthusiastic one. Yet the American education system expects nearly all students to learn how to write an essay. It's little wonder, then, that as soon as a tool arrived promising to lessen the pain people grabbed it.

Like it or not, artificial intelligence is now firmly embedded in how students produce text. Somewhere between two-thirds and 90 percent of high school and college students are already using artificial intelligence for schoolwork, according to recent surveys, often requesting help with writing assignments.

A growing number of educators are alarmed, and insist that students should write without A.I. These teachers are returning to handwriting, blue books and proctored, in-class essay tests — all attempts to prevent students from outsourcing their writing to chatbots.

This is baffling to tech industry leaders, who see A.I. rejection as a form of educational malpractice. They point out that writing is already the leading use of A.I. in the workplace, and argue there is no need to continue suffering through

WRITING, PAGE 2

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Issue Number No. 44,618

PAGE TWO

He was known as the 'Butcher of Bosnia'

RATKO MLADIC
1943-2026

BY DAN BILEFSKY

PASCAL GUYOT/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

MIKE PERSSON/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

DIMITAR DILKOFF/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from left: Ratko Mladic in 1994, when his forces were besieging Sarajevo; civilians and a Bosnian special forces soldier under fire in Sarajevo by Serbian snipers; and relatives of the victims of the massacre at Srebrenica reacting to a live broadcast of Mr. Mladic's sentencing on charges including genocide and crimes against humanity.

Ratko Mladic, the former Bosnian Serb general whose actions during the Balkan wars of the 1990s led to his being called the "Butcher of Bosnia" and who was held responsible for Europe's deadliest massacre since World War II, the killing of some 8,000 Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995, has died in custody in The Hague. He was 83.

His death was announced on Thursday by Serbian state media. The authorities at The Hague said he died while hospitalized there but did not provide a specific cause of death.

Mr. Mladic was captured on May 26, 2011, in a farming village north of Belgrade, Serbia's capital, after almost 16 years as a fugitive, ending one of the longest manhunts in modern history. His 2017 conviction by an international tribunal on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes marked the end of a dark and bloody chapter.

In pronouncing a life sentence, the presiding judge, Alphons Orie, said Mr. Mladic's crimes ranked "among the most heinous known to humankind." Mr. Mladic appealed the verdict, which was upheld in 2021.

The Balkan wars erupted as Yugoslavia was breaking up into independent states. Slobodan Milosevic, the nationalist president of Serbia, one of those states, was intent on creating a Greater Serbia. He reawakened old ethnic and religious enmities and started wars pitting Serbs against Slovenes, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and the Albanians of Kosovo.

Roughly 100,000 people died during the conflict and more than 2.5 million were displaced.

A ruddy-faced and intimidating man with a bellowing voice, piercing blue eyes and a grandiose sense of himself, Mr. Mladic, an officer in the Yugoslav People's Army, led the army of the Bosnian Serbs in the early 1990s.

On the eve of the Srebrenica massacre, he promised to avenge the conquest of Serbia centuries before by the Ottoman Muslim Turks. Over 10 days, his soldiers hunted down, captured and summarily executed thousands of Bosnian Muslims, lining them up with hands tied behind their backs and shooting them. Women were raped. International pleas for restraint were ignored.

Serb forces buried the remains, dug them up again and scattered them in distant mass graves in an organized effort to hide damning evidence of war crimes.

Mr. Mladic's trial was among the last high-profile ones at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. The tribunal wound down after trying nearly 100 of those responsible for the atrocities of the Balkan wars, including Mr. Mladic's boss, Radovan Karadzic, the political leader of the Bosnian Serbs.

Arrested in 2008, Mr. Karadzic was convicted in 2016 on charges almost identical to Mr. Mladic's, and his sentence was extended to life in prison three years later.

Mr. Mladic's arrest was a signal moment in Serbia's long effort to shed its status as a pariah nation. It removed a major obstacle to the country's stillpending accession to the European Union, which had grown weary of the refusal of successive Serbian governments to capture him.

When he was finally tracked down, he was hiding in the house of a cousin and was so desperate for money that one of his repeated demands was the restoration of his frozen military pension.

During his trial, Mr. Mladic, once a seemingly invincible warrior, at times appeared reduced to a meek old man, as witness after witness offered harrowing testimony about the violence he had unleashed. His right arm was impaired by the effects of at least two strokes he suffered while a fugitive, and he was unable to take notes.

Flashes of the mercurial, domineering general remained, though. In his first court appearance in June 2011, he dismissed the charges against him as "obnoxious" and "monstrous." At other times, he yelled at the judges.

At one point, he was absent from a session, apparently to receive treatment for high blood pressure. When he returned, he raged at the bench, shouting, "Everything you are saying is a pure lie!" He was removed from the court.

In addition to masterminding the massacre at Srebrenica, Mr. Mladic was eventually also convicted of multiple crimes tied to the nearly four-year siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital, in which 10,000 people died, including 1,500 children.

During the siege, the longest in the history of modern warfare, Mr. Mladic's men shelled the city from surrounding mountains and terrorized civilians with sniper bullets. Judges also found him guilty of the persecution and extermination of non-Serbs living in large swaths of Bosnia.

Within Serbia, Mr. Mladic's military prowess was legendary. Ljiljana Bulatovic, who wrote a biography of him, said he remained a hero to many Serbs, who would always regard him as "the mythical protector of the Serbian people."

But the magnitude of the crimes he was accused of — and the immense suffering he inflicted on Bosnians and Croats driven from lands slated for Serbs — provoked international revulsion and the offer of a $14 million reward for his capture, though it was never claimed after Serbian war crimes investigators seized him.

His early life of desolation and struggle may have helped sustain him during his long, spartan years as a fugitive.

"He had a strong psychological makeup," Ratko Skrbic, a former general who served under him, later said. "It has to do with military honor. He was brought up never to surrender."

Ratko Mladic was born into poverty in the remote village of Bozanovici on March 12, 1943, when the area was part of the Independent State of Croatia, a Nazi puppet state dominated by fanatical Croat nationalists.

His father, Neda Mladic, an ethnic Serb member of the communist-led partisan resistance, was killed when Ratko was a toddler, and his mother, Stana (Lalovic) Mladic, raised him and his two siblings. His family's experience planted in Mr. Mladic a deep fear that ethnic Serbs, unless they held the upper hand, would always face persecution by Croats and other ethnic groups.

He was a metalworker as a young man, but soon turned toward the military for his schooling. With his sharp mind, physical strength and a charisma that inspired deep loyalty, Mr. Mladic rose swiftly in the Yugoslav People's Army.

He was said to have adhered early in his military career to Josip Broz Tito's brand of communism, which rejected nationalism and called instead for Yugoslav brotherhood as a way of holding together Yugoslavia's fragile assemblage of multiethnic, multireligious republics.

Tito died in 1980, and after Mr. Milosevic stirred up nationalist grudges and Yugoslavia had begun to disintegrate in the early 1990s, Mr. Mladic took up Mr. Milosevic's cause: halting separatism and assuring the dominance of the Serbs, the largest ethnic group. In 1992, a month after the Bosnian Republic's declaration of independence, Mr. Mladic's forces began the siege of Sarajevo.

In 1994, his daughter, Ana, a medical student in her early 20s, killed herself with his prized military pistol, apparently distraught by her father's actions in the war.

In July 1995, with video cameras rolling, Mr. Mladic's bodyguards handed out candies to Bosnian Muslim children. "No one will be harmed," Mr. Mladic told terrified women and children on July 12, patting a young boy on the head. At the time, his soldiers were preparing to conduct the mass killings.

After the massacre, the outrage in Washington and Europe prompted a NATO bombing campaign that overcame Bosnian Serb forces and led to the Dayton Accords that ended the Balkan wars in December 1995, though conflict in the former Yugoslavia erupted again in 1998 over Kosovo.

In 1995, the international tribunal in The Hague, which had been created two years earlier, indicted Mr. Mladic on war crimes and genocide charges related to the Sarajevo siege and the Srebrenica massacre.

Marlise Simons, Doreen Carvajal and David Rohde contributed reporting.

What students lose when A.I. writes their essays

WRITING, FROM PAGE 1

the task without help. After all, they say, chatbots now exceed the ability of most human beings to produce fluent prose.

All this points to some questions about writing itself: Why work so hard to learn it? And what do students stand to lose when they stop facing down a blank page, alone with their thoughts?

The scholars who study writing and cognition are rarely reflexively opposed to A.I. Many have spent decades anticipating a leap in computer-assisted writing, just like the one we are living through. They tend to be excited by the technology's potential.

Still, their work casts doubt on the tech-industry push to embed A.I. at every stage of the student writing process, from brainstorming to drafting to revising. Research shows that traditional, unassisted composition is valuable, not despite its difficulty, but because of it. Writing builds our working memory, executive planning skills and metacognition — the ability to think about our thinking, weigh alternate viewpoints and revise for clarity and style. It takes decades to develop writing skills, from toddlerhood into adulthood.

"Writing is a technology for thinking," Dr. Kellogg said.

WRITING SUBSTITUTE OR HELPER?

Learning to write did not always matter so much.

Before the 1870s, American students were tested through oral exams. College seats were reserved for the elite — future ministers and lawyers, professions where public speaking dominated.

But the rise of the modern, urban economy, and the invention of the typewriter, produced jobs that dealt more heavily with the written word, like office clerks and advertising copywriters. Starting in the late 19th century, students needed to learn how to write more fluently, and school curriculums, tied closely to the demands of industry, adapted. As more students went to college, and class sizes grew, administering oral tests also became too time-consuming, according to the linguist Naomi S. Baron, who traces this history in her book "Who Wrote This?"

Besides, teachers discovered that writing itself deepened knowledge. "If you want to think, understand and learn something, text really is preferable," Dr. Baron said.

Cognitive research confirms that writing is a powerful aid in helping us to retain information we read. The work of writing forces us to stress-test our ideas, allowing the writer to respond to counterarguments and cite sources. Revision is a practice of self-critique and self-improvement, and can be social, as well, if feedback is elicited. Writing can also be empowering, allowing us to share our experiences and express our views. It can even be healing, which is why therapists sometimes suggest keeping a journal.

It is not clear if these benefits can be fully realized when writing alongside artificial intelligence. There are reasons to be wary.

Last year, a small study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology showed that individuals who wrote in partnership with A.I. chatbots recorded lower brain activity while they wrote, compared with those who worked without chatbots. The writers who used A.I. struggled to remember what, exactly, they had written, and felt little ownership over their work.

The findings join a growing body of research suggesting that frequent A.I. use can degrade critical thinking.

Nevertheless, tech companies are aggressively marketing A.I. writing assistants to students and schools.

Jenny Maxwell, general manager for education at Superhuman, the A.I. company that makes the popular writing app Grammarly, told me that we are living through a "burn it down" moment for teaching and learning. Educators who try to withhold A.I. writing tools are essentially announcing to their students — "consumers," she called them — that their coursework is irrelevant to the job market.

LAUREN LANCASTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jessica Binney, an English teacher in a New York suburb, has used A.I. as a tool in her creative writing class but is wary of students' use of the tech to complete homework.

She did acknowledge that some basic, human writing skills remain valuable. Students need to write well enough to have a sense of which A.I. text suggestions to accept and which to reject, she said. Ms. Maxwell also insisted that creativity in writing would persist, because people would still want to express their personal voice and style.

To that end, companies like Grammarly, Google and OpenAI are creating so-called Socratic versions of their chatbots, sold to schools as writing helpers that will guide students through assignments without doing the work for them.

(The New York Times is suing OpenAI, along with two other companies, Microsoft and Perplexity, for copyright infringement.)

THE NEED FOR LIMITS

A.I. is already ubiquitous: on every device, in every web search, insisting that it can summarize for us, analyze for us, write for us. It steps in even when we have not invited it.

For students with still-developing minds, the most urgent question, then, is how to protect thinking in a world where it has become so easy to outsource writing.

We might begin by considering what A.I. is actually good at when it comes to composition. A.I. can be especially useful for those with disabilities or who are nonnative English speakers, said Steve Graham, a writing expert and educational psychologist at Arizona State University. Chatbots can correct grammar and suggest potential trims or revisions for clarity. With A.I., there have been immense strides in accurate voice-to-text transcription for writers who cannot physically type or write by hand.

And A.I. can offer all of this help privately, with no need to be vulnerable and expose a rough first draft to another person's judgment. For many American students, especially the third with below-basic literacy skills, the writing process can be painful and embarrassing, and a reason many dread homework and exams.

But, Dr. Graham cautioned, there is no part of the writing process that can be handed over to A.I. without some cost. Intellectual growth occurs at every stage, from brainstorming to fine-tuning a final draft. If writing is thinking, then any part of the struggle that is outsourced to technology amounts to relinquishing some freedom to perceive. How will students ever know what they really think of anything — whether it's "The Crucible" or A.I. itself — if they ask a machine to spit out an answer for them?

Last year, a group of writing experts, including Dr. Graham, assembled at the University of California, Irvine, to produce recommendations to schools.

They did not reject A.I. Instead, they called on schools to resist the temptation to devote less time to writing — not because it will continue to be such a critical skill in the workplace, where it's already waning, but to sharpen the mind.

Writing should be embedded across the curriculum, they advised. Students should continue to do the hard work of drafting their own sentences, paragraphs and eventually full essays about their lives and about what they have read, both fiction and nonfiction. All this teaches grammar and vocabulary, certainly. But it also allows students to master the knowledge they are gaining.

This spring I visited John Jay High School, in the New York suburbs, to report on how one English teacher, Jessica Binney, was dealing with A.I.

In a creative-writing class, she had students prompt a chatbot to write a poem. The results were predictably generic, so students then asked the chatbot to make revisions, considering where the bot performed well and where it fell short.

Still, like many educators, she had tired of policing A.I. misuse on takehome assignments. In her Advanced Placement English course, she moved much of the essay writing, produced inside the classroom, to pen and paper.

For the most part, students did not complain. Many had already been through an initial whirlwind romance with A.I., before rethinking their relationship with the tools. Ainsley Graham, a junior, told me she was thrilled by ChatGPT's ability to help with data analysis in a science research class, but recognized the risks of using chatbots to write essays about literature.

"You're not strengthening that muscle by actually analyzing these really hard texts," she said. "They're meant to be hard."

When Cassady Tondorf, 17, learned how chatbots produced writing, she realized their utter lack of originality. "The entire internet is open to it," she said. "It's just regenerating the same things, over and over."

If she wanted to be valuable on the job market, she felt, she would need to have ideas and skills that were uniquely her own.

World

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ATUL LOKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above left and top right, residents waiting to be airlifted by helicopter in the Rasuwa district of Nepal. Above right, the flood's aftermath along the Bhotekoshi River. The floods erased more than 25 miles of roads and washed away 40 suspension bridges, officials said.

Survivors of Nepal flood are left in disbelief

DHUNCHE, NEPAL

Visit to border laid bare the enormous devastation after hundreds were killed

BY ANUPREETA DAS

Above from left: Nepal Army personnel helping an injured resident; and bracing themselves against the wind and dust kicked up by a rescue helicopter during evacuation operations in the flooded Rasuwa district.

The survivors sat patiently, waiting for their turn to be transported to safety. Some wept. Mothers clutched their babies. Husbands grieved for the wives whose hands they could no longer hold. And some onlookers expressed guilt that they had little to grieve for.

But mostly, on Thursday, a day after a huge chunk of a glacier fell and triggered a devastating flood and mud slide in Nepal, leaving more than 460 dead and about 1,000 others missing, people along the border with Tibet were still in disbelief at the bewildering speed with which a river's fury had upended their lives.

In a matter of minutes, a grayish brown sludge of sand and pulverized rock had appeared out of nowhere and erased the bearings of their lives: Homes, shops, schools, fields, roads and bridges were mostly gone. Even the wreckage seemed to have disappeared, dragged downstream.

"They all died, and I lived," said Dawa Lama, 45, starting to weep as he recounted how, just before 9 a.m. on Wednesday, he had heard a thunderclap, and then felt a breeze. Before he knew it, an enormous wave of muddy water had slammed into his home of 12 years in the border village of Timure, carrying away not just his belongings but also his wife and their two daughters, 7 and 8.

"How long can I remain in hope, I don't know," Mr. Lama said. His neighbor, who had also lost family members, placed a hand on Mr. Lama's shoulder to comfort him.

Hundreds of people like Mr. Lama who were rescued from the region in northern Nepal — one of the world's poorest countries — have landed in Dhunche, a town about 17 miles (27 kilometers) from the Tibetan border where the Nepal Army has a search-and-rescue base.

Accompanied by a New York Times photographer, I flew with local journalists on a military helicopter to this remote area to see what was left of life. As we traveled over the Bhotekoshi River, which runs from Tibet to Nepal, signs of the miles of devastation left behind were visible even from on high.

A major highway that ran alongside the river and connected Nepal and Tibet, facilitating the movement of goods like cars and apples, had almost entirely disappeared into the flash flood's maw.

The floods erased more than 25 miles of roads and washed away 40 suspension bridges, officials said, stranding a quarter of a million Nepalis. In Gyirong County, in Tibet, over 550 people were missing, Chinese state media reported.

Few houses were standing, mostly on the hillsides where the water couldn't reach. In many places, the river had left a mud line more than 650 feet (200 meters) high.

The Nepal Army's base at Dhunche was packed with hundreds of army personnel and the survivors they had rescued.

The helicopters taking off or landing about every 15 minutes from two helipads ferried injured people rescued from villages and towns nearby or rations of dried food. They also transported people from Dhunche to temporary shelters in bigger cities like Trishuli and Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal.

As emergency workers searched Himalayan valleys for survivors of a colossal flood that killed hundreds of people, the Nepali and Chinese authorities warned that a second flood might be coming.

A senior officer told me that the search would go on as long as rescuers continued to find people, most likely for another three or four days. By midafternoon on Thursday, the army had managed to find about 500 survivors; it had rescued 200 the day before. Some sat alone in a stupor, while others took comfort in groups.

In the worst-hit areas, some survived because they had outrun the Bhotekoshi River as it climbed tens of meters up the sides of the rugged Himalayan valley through which it flows.

Among the survivors was Bhushan Thakur, a hairdresser who said he had fled from his salon as soon as he saw the huge wall of sludge making its way toward him. Mr. Thakur, 38, said he and two others had run for their lives, leaping up the hillside.

"We jumped, and jumped," he said, "otherwise, we would have died."

Mujib Mashal contributed reporting from New Delhi.

Prince William put to test by Harry's return to Britain

NEWS ANALYSIS
LONDON

BY MICHAEL D. SHEAR

PETER NICHOLLS/REUTERS

From left, Catherine, Prince William, Prince Harry and Meghan after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 2022. The brothers have not had a conversation in public since the funeral.

Prince William, the future king of England, has said nothing publicly about his brother's decision to return home. Not on social media. Not through a royal spokesman. Not a word.

Since the decision was reported, the British news media has exploded into a speculative frenzy about where Prince Harry and his family will live, what he will do, and most of all, whether he will reconcile with his estranged brother. William's silence hangs heavy over the monarchy he will eventually inherit.

The heir to the throne has worked for years to show that he will be a new kind of monarch, more in tune with the modern world than his father or grandmother could be. In public campaigns, he has encouraged men, especially, to confront mental health challenges, to abandon the "stiff upper lip" that is so typically British, and to be open to the idea of seeking therapy.

Earlier this year, he let it be known that he maintains a "quiet faith" and wants to form "a strong and meaningful bond" with the Church of England when he is king.

"Forgiveness is at the heart of Christian morality," said Ed Owens, a royal historian. "There would be great magnanimity on his part if he would look like the bigger person."

And yet, the royal rift between Harry and the sibling he used to call Willy remains wide, by all accounts. There is little evidence that anything has been resolved since the pair's intense clashes in the months before Harry and his wife, Meghan, left Britain, some of which Harry wrote about in his memoir, "Spare."

"He grabbed me by the collar, ripping my necklace, and he knocked me to the floor," Harry wrote about one physical altercation with William in 2019, which Harry claimed took place in the cottage he shared with Meghan. "I landed on the dogs' bowl, which cracked under my back, the pieces cutting into me. I lay there for a moment, dazed, then got to my feet and told him to get out."

Kensington Palace has long refused to comment on that accusation, though royal watchers have said that William denies that a physical altercation ever took place. It is clear from what hasn't happened — any public conversation between the two men since Queen Elizabeth's funeral four years ago — that the breach remains deep.

In 1997, the brothers endured the tragedy of their mother Diana's death at the age of 36 when her car crashed while paparazzi were chasing it in Paris. William was 15 and Harry 12. In "Spare," Harry wrote of the "decade of unrelenting pain" he experienced as he tried to make sense of the loss.

"Both William and Harry have to be carrying the trauma from their childhood and that will complicate their reactions to anything," said Catherine Mayer, the author of "Divide and Rule: Royal Women and Their Battles." "It made them unbelievably close, but it also means that the feelings they have for each other are bound to be strong in all sorts of ways."

Stronger, even, than the anger that clearly existed between Harry and his father, King Charles III, after the prince arrived in the United States and aired the royal family's dirty laundry in interviews, documentaries and a tell-all book, accusing some in the family of racism and bullying aimed at Meghan.

At the time, Buckingham Palace said in a statement that "some recollections may vary" but that the accusations were being "taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately." The statement also said that Harry and Meghan "will always be much loved family members."

In 2025, Harry met with his father for tea at the king's London residence, in what appeared to be the first step toward healing their rift. Last month, Charles and Queen Camilla met privately with Harry, Meghan and their two children, Archie, 7, and Lilibet, 5, at Highgrove House in Gloucestershire. By all accounts — none of them detailed or specific — the meeting went well.

A person familiar with the king's response to the family's move back to Britain said recently that Charles "welcomes the opportunity to see more of the Sussex family in a private and personal capacity."

No such sentiment was released by anyone close to William. When asked for comment, Kensington Palace, which represents William and Catherine, said it did not comment on anything related to Harry and Meghan.

Since Queen Elizabeth's funeral, Harry has only been in the same place as William twice, once for his father's coronation as king in May 2023, and again when both men attended a memorial service for their uncle, Lord Robert Fellowes, in August of 2024. On both occasions, Harry and William did not appear to interact with each other at all.

This month, people close to Harry and Meghan made it known that the couple were moving back and had enrolled their children in school in Britain.

The explanation offered by The Sun and The Daily Telegraph, the two British newspapers that each claimed to have the story exclusively, was simple enough. The exiled prince and his wife wanted to bring their children up in the peace and quiet of the British countryside where Harry has some of his fondest memories.

"HARRY & MEG COMING HOME," the Sun headline blared on Wednesday. "Royals move back from US to raise kids in UK."

The family reportedly arrived in Britain on a private plane on Wednesday, though their spokesman declined to confirm it. At the time of writing, there was no public welcome home or statement of well wishes from Charles or William.

The question is how long that silence can last, especially from the country's future king.

Now that Harry is back, William will be peppered with questions about whether, and when, they might reconnect. Will Harry and Meghan and the children be invited to the royal family's Christmas celebrations? Will Harry join William — even as a non-working royal — at any public events? What about their children, who have spent almost no time together?

The answers may depend on how the next few weeks and months unfold. Some royal watchers have predicted that Harry and Meghan will try to keep a low profile at first to minimize confrontations.

"What we're probably going to see is a couple laying relatively low, steadily trying to rebuild their public images," Mr. Owens said. "And doing so discreetly. They're not coming here for another fight or for more acrimony."

Saudis seem poised for new war with Houthis

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

Weeks of attacks open possibility of another front in Iran conflict

BY VIVIAN NEREIM

After weeks of attacks by Yemen's Houthi militia on Saudi ships, airports and oil facilities, Saudi Arabia appears to be preparing for a renewed war against the group, analysts say, potentially deepening the turmoil in the Middle East.

It is unclear what Saudi Arabia's goals would be if it were to go back to full-blown war with the Houthis. But it could open a new front in the U.S. war with Iran — the Houthis' primary backer.

When the kingdom last embarked on a bombing campaign against the Houthis, in 2015, it turned into a decade-long quagmire that entrenched the group's rule in northern Yemen and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis from violence, hunger and disease.

Few observers or officials believe there is a realistic path to routing the militia entirely. Instead, Saudi Arabia could aim to weaken the group and pressure it to negotiate a resolution to Yemen's civil war that is more favorable to the kingdom and its Yemeni allies, analysts say.

Channels that were kept open for years between the two sides appear to have broken down. "I am not seeing a political offramp at this point," said Mohammed al-Basha, a Yemen-focused political analyst based in Washington. "War is coming."

This past week, the Houthis claimed responsibility for a ballistic missile attack on a Saudi oil tanker as well as two attacks on Saudi-backed forces inside Yemen, with the group's military spokesman, Yahya Saree, promising to confront any escalation with "stronger and more severe strikes."

A Saudi official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with government protocol, said that the kingdom prefers peace, but is ready for war with the Houthis, and will protect itself by any means necessary.

If the Houthis continue to escalate their attacks, he added, the kingdom would be willing to conduct airstrikes to support the Yemeni government — effectively, a motley coalition of anti-Houthi forces — in its battle against the militia.

KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

A demonstration in Sanaa, Yemen's capital, in support of the Houthi militia last month. The Houthis, who control northern Yemen on Saudi Arabia's border, are supported by Iran.

Yemeni analysts say the militia is acting in part to aid Iran, but that it is also pushing to consolidate its power and secure access to Yemen's oil resources, after years of political stalemate. The group is increasingly describing itself as a legitimate state and demanding to be treated as such.

Tensions between the kingdom and the militia began to escalate last month, after the Houthis accused Saudi Arabia of bombing Yemen's main international airport to prevent an Iranian plane from landing, which the kingdom denied. The Houthis then declared a maritime blockade on Saudi ships in the Red Sea.

Since then, Saudi Arabia has carried out limited airstrikes in Yemen, and the Houthis have launched missile and drone attacks inside Saudi Arabia, in addition to attacking Saudi ships in the Red Sea.

Those attacks have put pressure on global energy markets, in line with Iran's own interests. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, typically ships its oil through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the world's oceans that Iran has effectively closed since the Iran war began. The kingdom now relies on the Red Sea to export most of its oil.

Inside Yemen, clashes between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government have escalated sharply in recent weeks.

"Yemen today faces a more serious risk of return to large-scale conflict than at any point since the 2022 U.N.-mediated truce," the United Nations envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, warned in a briefing to the U.N. Security Council on Aug. 13.

The Houthis say that their attacks are pre-emptive, accusing the Saudi and Yemeni governments of amassing forces in preparation for a ground offensive against them.

Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a Houthi political official, said in an interview that the militia was already "practically in a state of war with Saudi Arabia."

The Houthis are "keen to keep our options open" and hope to prevent "an expansion of the conflict," he said. But if full-scale war breaks out, they will "destroy all of Saudi Arabia's oil and vital facilities," he added, "just as it did to Yemen."

He accused Saudi Arabia of imposing "a blockade on Yemen by force of arms and preventing food, medicine and basic necessities from reaching the Yemeni people."

Saudi officials deny that allegation. They accuse the Houthis of trying to evade a U.N. inspection regime and other safeguards meant to prevent the militia from obtaining weaponry and funding.

Analysts say that there are now signs of a broader military buildup on both sides.

Ahmed Nagi, a senior analyst for Yemen at the International Crisis Group, said that Saudi Arabia has improved military coordination between different anti-Houthi factions. It is also providing those forces with advanced weaponry, which "has never been the case in the past," Mr. Nagi added.

In an interview with a Saudi newspaper published this month, Abdullah al-Alimi, a member of the Yemeni government's presidential leadership council, praised Saudi Arabia's role in providing training and other assistance to Yemeni government forces.

Few observers or officials believe there is a realistic path to routing the Houthis entirely.

It has become "inevitable," he said, that the Saudi-backed Yemeni government will retake Sanaa from the Houthis.

For Saudi Arabia, there are many reasons to avoid war: Another battle with the Houthis could drain its finances and defense stockpiles, and it could endanger the crown prince's plans to turn the kingdom into a business and tourism hub.

The Houthis, though, are "not ready to negotiate" and are pushing for political concessions in Yemen, while also acting to aid their main backer, Iran, Mr. Nagi said.

Experts and diplomats fear that any escalation will increase the suffering of tens of millions of people in Yemen.

"No party controls where escalation leads," Mr. Grundberg said during his U.N. briefing. "The only certainty is that the Yemeni people will pay the price."

Shuaib Almosawa contributed reporting from Sanaa, Yemen, Saeed Al-Batati from al-Mukalla, Yemen, Eric Schmitt from Washington, Adam Rasgon from Tel Aviv and Edward Wong from Kutaisi, Georgia.

A sanctioned bank's staying power

Iranian lender has taken hits, but it benefits from strong government backing

BY LARA JAKES AND JAMES PATON

Iran's biggest bank has been hit by sanctions many times over the past 20 years. This past week, the Trump administration targeted it again, aiming to eliminate its ability to operate abroad.

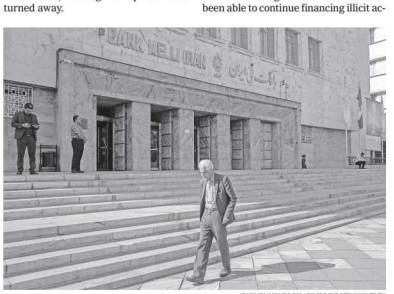
Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent vowed on Monday to punish countries that do business with Iran as part of Operation Economic Outcast, intensifying the administration's economic war on Tehran. One of his few specific demands took aim at Bank Melli's foreign operations. "Every Bank Melli branch must be shuttered and dark," he said.

Waves of sanctions have already severely limited the bank's ability to do business abroad, mirroring Iran's broader economic isolation.

The state-owned bank has faced rounds of bruising financial penalties at least since the United States formally accused it in 2007 of funding Tehran's nuclear and missile programs. Countries around the world, as well as the United Nations and the European Union, have also sought to curb the bank's suspected use of foreign front companies to finance illicit activities.

In the United Arab Emirates, an employee who answered the phone at Melli's branch in Dubai on Tuesday confirmed it was open for business.

And in London, the lights were on at the Melli branch in the affluent Kensington neighborhood. A sign at the front door directed passers-by to a side entrance, and a half-dozen people could be seen inside, although a reporter was turned away.



ARASH KHAMOOSHI/POLARIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Bank Melli in Tehran. The bank has faced bruising financial penalties at least since 2007, when the United States accused it of funding Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

Bank Melli's staying power relies on its backing by the Iranian government and the nearly 3,100 domestic branches it operates. It has long maintained an international footprint, as well, with branches elsewhere in the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

Some countries, notably neighboring Iraq in 2024, have revoked Bank Melli's operating licenses under sanctions pressure. Other governments, like Britain and the European Union, have imposed such severe restrictions that local branches, while still open, are mostly unable to move money or facilitate trade with Iran, which is at the heart of the bank's foreign operations.

An employee who answered the phone at Melli's branch in Dubai on Tuesday confirmed it was open for business.

U.S. officials have long accused Melli of creating or otherwise using international companies as a cover to send and receive funds as part of Iran's shadow banking network, worth an estimated tens of billions of dollars in annual trade. The U.S. Treasury Department asserts that the network was set up to evade economic sanctions, and funds Iran's military activities and proxies.

In January, for example, Treasury officials accused businesses in the Emirates and Singapore of either acting as, or working through, front companies to funnel money to and from Iran through Bank Melli conduits.

"Bank Melli's reach has certainly shrunk in recent years," said Matthew Levitt, who was a top Treasury Department intelligence official under former President George W. Bush. "But it has been able to continue financing illicit activity through subsidiaries and selective enforcement in various countries around the world."

For years, Mr. Levitt said, the Emirates played an "outsize role" as an illicit financing hub for Iran, facing more economic penalties for its ties to Tehran than any other country except China. Iranian-Emirati trade was worth roughly $28 billion in 2024, when the Emirates was Iran's largest source of imports.

President Trump derided the Emirates this past winter as "like the banker for Iran."

But relations between the Emirates and Iran have chilled this year, amid the air war waged against Iran by the United States and Israel. Iranian forces have launched drones and missiles at the Emirates and other countries that host U.S. military bases.

This month, the Emirates said it would halt all trade and financial transactions with Iran, moving to accelerate pressure on Tehran as its economic crisis worsens by the day.

Iran's finance minister, Ali Madanizadeh, predicted on Tuesday that many countries would refuse to accept Mr. Bessent's demands, "either officially or unofficially."

"Naturally, our enemies intend to launch an economic terrorist attack against us, but we have our own tools as well, and we know how to play the game," Mr. Madanizadeh told Iranian state television.

In Britain, where Melli has operated since 1967, sanctions have "significantly curtailed" the company's ability to operate and led to "material uncertainty" that the bank's British business could continue as a going concern, according to its 2025 annual report.

Last September, Britain and the European Union reimposed sanctions on Melli, along with other institutions and individuals linked to Iran's nuclear program. The moves hit Melli's branches in London, Paris and Hamburg, Germany, hard.

Melli's British unit, which held about 100 million euros ($117 million) in deposits as of December, said in its annual report that it had shifted its focus from growth to "protecting the remaining assets of the bank." The subsidiary employed 43 people last year, on average, and the bank laid off some employees "to align its cost base with its restricted business model."

A woman who answered the side door at the Kensington branch refused to answer questions on Tuesday, as did a staff member answering the customer service phone line. A pair of uniformed police officers entered the building, stayed about 15 minutes, then left.

Vivian Nereim, Lynsey Chutel, Erika Solomon, Sanam Mahoozi contributed reporting.

Iranians are losing hope

IRAN, FROM PAGE 1

ar weapon, changing the government and obliterating its missile program, Mr. Trump threatened to wipe out Iranian civilization, strike the country's infrastructure and send the country "back to the Stone Ages." U.S. and Israeli strikes also hit or damaged places that are important to civilians, including steel plants, petrochemical facilities, bridges and historic cultural sites.

Several Iranians said they now view the United States as fundamentally self-interested, but also incompetent and inconsistent.

"I didn't think they would put on such a show of contradictory and childish positions," said Mostafa, 38, a technology worker in Iran's northern Gilan Province, of Mr. Trump and his administration.

The United States is now betting that increased economic pressure will force the Iranian government to succumb by curbing its nuclear program or fully reopening the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route for Middle Eastern oil that it has effectively blockaded since the start of the war. American and Israeli pressure on Iran, including killing Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, at the start of the war, has failed to force the country's leaders to back down. Instead, the government has been more resilient than its critics expected and become more authoritarian.

Many Iranians celebrated when Ayatollah Khamenei was killed, but he was replaced as supreme leader by his son, Mojtaba. The authorities have shown even less tolerance for dissent than before, executing dozens of political prisoners and going after critics.

"The Islamic Republic is convinced that it has defeated the world and that everyone is afraid of it," said Behzad, 44, a public relations executive in Tehran.

Ali, 42, an engineer in the northern Mazandaran Province, echoed this view. "At this point, I have much less hope that the Islamic Republic will fall," he said.

The most immediate preoccupation for most Iranians, however, is figuring out how to survive in an economy that was in free fall even before the Trump administration unveiled new restrictions this past week.

The rate of inflation has soared to 84 percent, the central bank said recently. Food prices are rising every week, and even eggs are out of reach for a lot of middle- and working-class Iranians. Anxiety that the price of gasoline, which is heavily subsidized in Iran, may soon increase has led to long lines at gas stations as Iranians try to fill up.

The Iranian currency, the rial, has plunged in value and hit a record low of roughly two million to the dollar in recent days, causing prices of imported goods to surge.

"Everyone is scrambling to buy and stock up on food, especially Pakistani rice," said Marzieh, 44, a teacher in Bandar Abbas, a port city in southern Iran. The south of the country has been far more affected by the war than other areas, as the United States launched airstrikes this summer to try to dislodge Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz.

Even staples, like chickpeas, have become more expensive, Marzieh said, and she had given up on going to cafes and hosting people at home.

"What's frightening is that our salaries are already running out before the new month even begins," she said.

Given all the pressure, several Iranians said they expected a new round of protests to begin soon, despite the authorities' use of lethal force to crush nationwide demonstrations in January. Those protests began in late December after the value of the rial plunged, and the currency has sunk in value even further. Still, Iranian officials have tried to assure the public that they can manage the situation.

If the government reduced access to heavily subsidized fuel, that would put further stress on many Iranians.

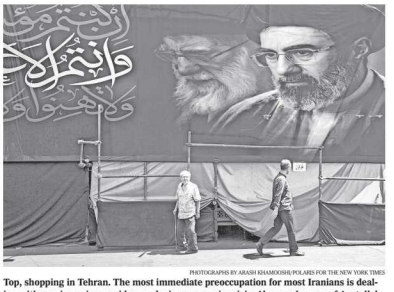
"You cannot stop an economic uprising with anything," said Esmaeil, 37, an artist in Tehran. "War won't stop it, and violence won't stop it."

For now, many are just trying to get through the increasingly difficult days.

Iranians, Esmaeil said, had fallen into a "black hole."

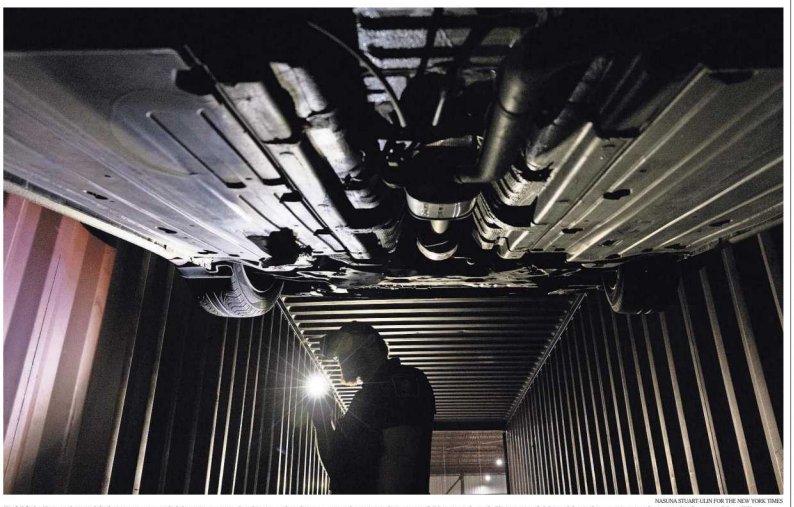
"People are hungry, confused and unable to find a way out," he said. "We are alone in a catastrophic situation of chaos and abandonment."

Shirin Hakim and Sanam Mahoozi contributed reporting.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARASH KHAMOOSHI/POLARIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, shopping in Tehran. The most immediate preoccupation for most Iranians is dealing with soaring prices amid an enduring economic crisis. Above, a banner of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the former supreme leader, and his son Mojtaba, who replaced him.



NASUNA STUART-ULIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Frédéric Bonsaint said that every week his team searched around a dozen containers at the port of Montreal and discovered 20 to 30 stolen cars worth a total of up to $2 million.

Canadian cars 'stolen to order'

CANADA, FROM PAGE 1

The Interpol figures significantly undercount the problem, but Russia is by far the top international destination for Canadian cars reported to Interpol, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The number of cars stolen from Canadian streets, parking lots and driveways is a measure of how Western sanctions have had surprising, and at times undesired, consequences. Just as a network of smugglers and dilapidated tankers expanded to evade oil embargoes, criminal groups moved to fill the void when Western automakers left the Russian market and many countries banned auto exports there.

"The stolen cars are not by chance," said Renato Schipani, who oversees Interpol's stolen vehicle database. "They are stolen to order."

Demand for pricey Western cars has always been high in Russia. The sanctions unintentionally incentivized sellers to find illicit ways to supply the market, driving up prices and making the cars even more of a status symbol, Mr. Aleynik said at the Chortkiv detention facility in western Ukraine.

The Interpol records are imperfect. Cars can sometimes inadvertently be counted twice, and some countries, including the United States, do not reliably report thefts to Interpol. Others do not report recovered cars. But law enforcement officials say the figures reflect trends and offer an important snapshot of how stolen cars move internationally.

Since Canada's car theft epidemic began in 2021, officials have introduced policing overhauls and invested tens of millions in tackling the crime. Theft rates have fallen, but stolen vehicles still flow through Canadian ports.

"The majority of the high value vehicles are still being stolen for export — that's where the money is," said Bryan Gast, a former police officer who is now intelligence lead for the nonprofit antifraud group Équité Association.

Canadian officials recognized early that stolen cars were ending up overseas. But at first, they eyed the wrong countries.

Car thefts surged in Canada after Covid lockdowns were lifted in 2021. With the global supply chain in turmoil, criminals spotted an opportunity.

BRENDAN HOFFMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"A forbidden fruit is always sweet," said Daniil Aleynik, a Russian national who is being held in a Ukrainian jail on charges of participating in an international car theft scheme.

Within a year, auto theft rates in Canada had reached historic highs and continued to climb.

"It was the Wild West," said Scott Cresswell, a detective at York Regional Police just outside Toronto. "People were having multiple cars stolen. Toronto would have been having 30 cars stolen a night."

The police recovered cars as often as they could, but thousands disappeared every year. In the hot spots of Ontario and Quebec, nearly half of the stolen cars vanished.

In August 2023, the authorities recovered several stolen cars in Toronto. Their investigation led them to a transnational crime network that was exporting stolen vehicles using bogus paperwork.

After the discovery, the Canadian border agency shifted its approach. Officials had primarily focused on investigating what was arriving in Canada. They began taking a closer look at what was leaving.

Agents began raiding shipping containers. As they did, they realized how lucrative the trade in stolen cars had become.

Frédéric Bonsaint, an officer at the border agency, said that every week, his team searched around a dozen containers at the Port of Montreal and discovered 20 to 30 stolen cars worth in total up to $2 million. Similar checks are carried out at other ports.

One day in June, Mr. Bonsaint cracked open a shipping container and peered in with a flashlight. Sandwiched between old mattresses, boxes of household goods and two legal cars was a gleaming white stolen Land Rover. The vehicle was worth around $125,000 new but would most likely sell for nearly double that, Mr. Bonsaint said.

The Land Rover had been bound for West Africa, Mr. Bonsaint said. That region and the Middle East are major destinations for used cars from around the world. For years, the Canadian authorities believed those markets alone were driving the car theft industry.

But it was not the whole story.

The flood of car thefts coincided with the financial sanctions and export bans that Western governments hoped would punish Russia for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That made Western vehicles more valuable.

The Russian black market did not create Canada's criminal gangs or smuggling networks. Those ingredients were already in place, said Mr. Aleynik, the Russian who faces car theft charges. The sanctions merely increased demand and profits.

Key to the effort, Mr. Aleynik said, are criminal contacts in Canada who falsify customs documents and share the latest intelligence on how to evade checks.

"I'm not going to point any fingers," Mr. Aleynik said, "because I've used their services myself. But that's why it's so easy in Canada."

In 2023, with thefts skyrocketing, officials from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police flew to Interpol's headquarters in Lyon, France. They wanted help tracking stolen vehicles and disrupting smuggling routes. They were willing to invest millions to fight the problem.

"Canada faced a big crisis," Mr. Schipani, the Interpol official, recalled.

Interpol's database contains information on more than 11 million vehicles from 137 countries. Officers who recover a car can check to see if it was reported stolen abroad.

After meeting with the Canadians, Mr. Schipani ran the figures. Huge numbers of recovered Canadian cars, he said, were arriving in Eastern Europe.

Interpol has a policy of not publicly identifying individual member countries. But the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said that the largest number were found in Russia.

Smugglers often moved stolen Canadian cars to Russia via the United Arab Emirates, according to the Mounties. Officials said that they had also identified routes through Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Lithuania.

The Canada-to-Russia pipeline was visible because Moscow remains an active participant in — and sometimes abuser of — Interpol's information-sharing programs. When the Russian authorities investigate a possible stolen car, they run it through Interpol's database. With each hit, the database automatically updates to say that a stolen car was found in Russia.

Last year, Detective Cresswell's team at York Regional Police joined forces with Équité, Interpol and other law enforcement authorities to help Canadians retrieve their stolen cars from overseas. The effort has returned around 200 vehicles to Canada, including some from Russia.

Last month, Mr. Cresswell said, six stolen cars arrived from Russia.

"It's groundbreaking to get cars repatriated from Russia," he said. "The idea was once that if a car reaches that soil, the car is gone."

C.I.A. chief urged Russia to end war

WASHINGTON

In secretive Moscow visit, John Ratcliffe delivered a bleak military assessment

BY ADAM ENTOUS AND JULIAN E. BARNES

John Ratcliffe, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, made a secretive visit to Moscow this past week to privately share his bleak assessment of the state of the Russian war against Ukraine, and to urge the Russians to cut a deal before their military and economic situation gets worse, current and former officials said.

Mr. Ratcliffe delivered the message to Aleksandr V. Bortnikov, the head of Russia's F.S.B. intelligence service, and made no threats about potential consequences for the Russian side should President Vladimir V. Putin ignore the C.I.A. director's assessment and choose to continue fighting.

C.I.A. analysts have long questioned whether Mr. Putin's advisers have given him honest assessments of the war's trajectory and toll.

The C.I.A. has long maintained communications channels with the F.S.B. and Russia's foreign intelligence service, which is known as the S.V.R.

Officials said Mr. Ratcliffe's intelligence channel with Bortnikov runs parallel to separate channels that President Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, and Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, have established with other senior advisers to Mr. Putin.

Some officials said they hoped that Mr. Putin, a former intelligence officer himself, would see a message from the C.I.A. director as more urgent and credible than communications through normal diplomatic channels.

For much of last year, Mr. Trump and some of his top advisers appeared to hold the belief that a Russian battlefield victory over Ukraine was inevitable because of Russia's larger population and its nuclear arsenal.

But the Russians have suffered massive losses, and their battlefield gains have stalled.

It is not clear whether Mr. Ratcliffe's message presaged any change in U.S. policy toward Russia or Ukraine.

Mr. Ratcliffe's visit was the latest effort by the Trump administration to breathe new life into stalled negotiations. It has become increasingly clear that Ukraine is not going to give up its fight in the east, even with reduced U.S. military support.

Given what he presented as the bleak military and economic reality for Russia, Mr. Ratcliffe told Mr. Bortnikov that he believed it was time for Moscow to engage in serious negotiations to end the war.

Since Mr. Trump's return to office, the United States has scaled back its military support to the Ukrainians, forcing them to rely more heavily on European partners.

The C.I.A. has maintained its close intelligence partnerships with the Ukrainians, which began more than a decade ago.

The private message that Mr. Ratcliffe delivered to Mr. Bortnikov about Ukraine echoed some of the director's public statements.

Last month, Mr. Ratcliffe spoke out about Russian troop losses during the war, and Moscow's inability to advance on the battlefield. He noted that the life expectancy of a Russian soldier on the front lines was less than 35 minutes.

And he added that Russia had gained only about 1 percent of Ukraine's total territory in the 18 months since he became C.I.A. director, a development he attributed to Ukraine's "mastery" of drone technology.

Before Mr. Ratcliffe met with Mr. Bortnikov in Moscow, he spoke with his Ukrainian counterparts, assuring them that he would be exploring Russian positions, not making concessions on behalf of the Ukrainians.

The Ukrainians have long viewed Mr. Witkoff and Mr. Kushner as too close to the Russians. They view Mr. Ratcliffe, a longtime Russia hawk, as a potentially more neutral mediator.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly used Mr. Ratcliffe as a discreet messenger.

In January, he became the first cabinet-level official to visit Venezuela after U.S. special operation forces seized President Nicolás Maduro.

In May, he traveled to Cuba, giving its leaders a bleak assessment of the state of the Cuban economy in the face of a U.S. oil blockade.

Direct contacts between U.S. and Russian spy chiefs have been sporadic in recent years.

In November 2021, William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director in the Biden administration, met face to face in Moscow with Mr. Bortnikov and other top Russian officials to warn Mr. Putin against launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

A year later, in November 2022, Turkey hosted a face-to-face meeting in Ankara between Mr. Burns and Sergei Naryshkin, the leader of Russia's foreign intelligence service. U.S. intelligence agencies had intercepted Russian communications about the possible use of a nuclear device by the Russians to slow Ukrainian advances in that fall's counteroffensive. Mr. Burns warned Mr. Naryshkin of serious consequences if the Russians acted on the alleged threat.

The Turkish hosts wanted the meeting to be the start of a lasting channel of direct communication between Washington and Moscow to reduce tensions. But the C.I.A. was angry at Moscow when, after the meeting, the Russian side made it public.

After Mr. Trump took office last year, Mr. Ratcliffe and Mr. Bortnikov worked out the details of a prisoner swap, but this past week's face-to-face meeting in Moscow was their first.

KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

John Ratcliffe, above, the C.I.A. director, delivered an urgent message to Aleksandr V. Bortnikov, the head of Russia's F.S.B. intelligence service in a secret visit to Moscow.

After victory, India's youth protesters return to the streets

NEW DELHI

BY ALEX TRAVELLI

India's long, hot summer of youth unrest shows no sign of cooling off, with protesters undeterred by monsoon rains or police crackdowns.

The police trained water cannons on crowds in the city of Patna on Tuesday, 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) east of New Delhi, the capital, as protesters tried to storm the office of the chief minister, the top elected official in the state. The protesters were condemning irregularities in a civil service entrance exam and demanding reforms of the testing system. Similar protests and clashes have gripped the nearby state of Jharkhand in recent weeks.

At the same time, the organizers of this summer's high-profile protests over education in India's capital have vowed to return to the streets. They had declared victory after the resignation of India's education minister, but are now accusing the government of failing to deliver on promises made to protesters to end the nationwide uprising.

Across the country, India's youth are expressing intense disillusionment with their education and the bleak opportunities ahead.

A government report released this past week showed that only about 8 percent of college graduates find jobs that make use of their degrees.

State and national authorities are simultaneously promising concessions and cracking down. Protests that peaked in New Delhi last month taking aim at Prime Minister Narendra Modi have spread to other states, including some governed by India's other parties.

The protesters in Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar, have spent weeks raising slogans against a complicated local array of government exams and recruitment programs.

The thrust of their demands match the frustrations over education and jobs that have been spreading since the start of this summer.

Abhijeet Dipke, the graduate student who started the Cockroach Janta Party, the group that led the earlier protests, has taken to the road with a "Fix Schools" campaign to assess and improve the physical condition of India's elementary classrooms.

His remarkable, grass-roots protest movement, started as satire, reached its high point last month when it forced the resignation of India's education minister, whom it blamed for botched standardized testing. Hours later, after securing several related commitments from Mr. Modi's government, the group called off its protests.

On Monday, it threatened to restart them.

SONU KISHAN/REUTERS

The police using water cannons to disperse protesters in Patna, India, on Tuesday. State and national authorities are simultaneously promising concessions and cracking down.

"On July 25, solemn promises were made," the C.J.P. told its 26 million followers on Instagram. But those promises have not been kept, it said, and so "we have been forced to return to the streets."

The education minister's ouster was an astonishing victory for the C.J.P. No one else during Mr. Modi's 12 years in power had succeeded in pressuring him to ditch a member of his cabinet.

The government made other concessions. It agreed to pay compensation to the families of students who died by suicide after the leak of a medical college entrance exam; to withdraw police cases against protesters; and to discuss a five-point charter on broader exam and education overhauls.

In the weeks since, the movement leaders' doubts have grown over the government's sincerity. Protesters said the criminal cases that were supposed to be dismissed have lingered, and there has been little movement on reforming the education system.

The group has cried foul, and on Sept. 5, India's Teacher's Day, they plan to lead a peaceful march from the India Gate monument, near the center of New Delhi, to the city's police headquarters. That risks another confrontation with security forces, who fired pellets and used batons and tear gas to disperse a similar march in July.

Putting a date on it sets high stakes. If protesters can be reassembled in large numbers, that will pile more pressure on Mr. Modi's government. Failing to do so would suggest the C.J.P. has lost momentum.

The police are at the heart of the movement's revived complaints. Of the agreements the Cockroach Party's leadership struck with the government, preventing the prosecution of protesters who marched in July was foremost. The police told the Supreme Court this month in an affidavit that the protests were "hijacked by antisocial elements."

It has proved difficult to keep track of the criminal indictments that police have filed against the protesters in the capital and in states governed by allies of Mr. Modi. The C.J.P. has asked the Supreme Court to consolidate a list. The government has refused to provide any written guarantee, arguing that it cannot interfere with charges already being considered by the courts.

Showkat Nanda contributed reporting.

WORLD

Murders fall in a city long scarred by violence

BALTIMORE

Baltimore is getting safer, but no one can say for sure why homicides are down

BY CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

Murder makes work.

As soon as somebody is killed, an enormous machinery kicks into gear, driven by cops and medics, nurses and lawyers, ministers and morticians. The mechanics aren't that different city to city, but in Baltimore the machinery has been as active and infamous as anywhere.

Now it is operating in a Baltimore that no one alive has experienced and few could have imagined. So far in 2026, Baltimore has recorded fewer homicides than ever at this point of the year, an incredible milestone in a place once morbidly referred to as "Bodymore."

For most of the past 50 years, the city's annual murder total exceeded 200. It ran above 300 for most of the last decade — a multiyear eruption of violence after the 2015 death of Freddie Gray from injuries in police custody. This year, the police commissioner aims for the count to stay under 100. It isn't unattainable. From January to August, there were 60 murders. There were 45 in July 2015 alone.

Across the country, homicides have fallen to record lows after a surge during the pandemic years. But the steepness of the decline in Baltimore stands out even against that backdrop.

What happened? Violent crime rates rise and fall for countless reasons: some enigmatic mix of policy, practice, economics and other unknowable factors. Credit or blame are impossible to assign precisely, though not for lack of trying.

In nearby Washington, no less a figure than President Trump is claiming credit for a drop in crime in the capital that was well underway before he returned to office. Last summer, he sent thousands of troops and federal officers into a city he declared was overrun with "bloodshed, bedlam and squalor."

The effects of what the White House calls the "unrelenting" efforts of Mr. Trump's D.C. task force and the thousands of arrests it has made will be long debated. But the drop in crime in Baltimore has been almost entirely on the city's own terms. The overall number of arrests in the city is far below what it was a dozen years ago. It would have been unimaginable in the raw aftermath of Mr. Gray's death, when a scathing civil rights investigation into Baltimore's police department, released a decade ago this month, found the force was overly aggressive and ineffective.

The mayor has championed programs to defuse tensions in volatile neighborhoods, enlisting those who know the fundamentals of street violence firsthand. Baltimore's top prosecutor has focused on making illegally carrying guns, let alone using them, very risky in a city rife with firearms.

There is still plenty of violence in the city. Shootings remain routine. Murder is not a rarity. The machine still has work.

But the difference is real: At this point four years ago, nearly 160 more people had been killed in Baltimore.

For those who were on duty when the bloodshed was at its worst, this new reality has been almost hard to fathom. And in a scarred city, they only hope it can last.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAROLINE GUTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, summer in Baltimore. The city has recorded the fewest homicides in decades at this point of the year. Above, awaiting a patient's arrival at a Baltimore trauma ward. Injuries from gunfire have plunged. "It's still happening, it's just not as severe," one nurse said.

"It's really weird now. You have these young detectives saying there's nothing going on."

DETECTIVE JONATHAN L. "J.J." JONES, Baltimore City Police

"It's when you stop seeing people getting shot, you know you're making progress."

DENNIS WISE, a violence interrupter with Safe Streets

THE DETECTIVE

"There'd be no way I'd be doing this right now," said Detective Jonathan L. "J.J." Jones, who has worked in the Baltimore police's homicide unit for nearly two decades.

Detective Jones, 49, was rolling through a neighborhood in south Baltimore, looking for someone among the rowhouses. The case was all but closed; a suspect had confessed. But he thought the evidence could be "tightened."

"I can play the long game now," he said.

In the 2010s and early 2020s, when bodies lined the hallway at the medical examiner's office, Detective Jones would be handed three new murder cases in a week, nearly as many as policing experts say detectives should be given in a year. He would come into work on a Wednesday and not return home until Sunday, rotating through changes of clothes he kept at the office.

That there are simply fewer murders to investigate is a big reason Baltimore's homicide clearance rate — the share of cases that result in an arrest — has risen to 60 percent this year, significantly above the national average, from 31 percent in 2015.

Historically, many of the city's murders have come out of disputes between small gangs or drug crews, bloody attempts to settle scores or send messages.

This was the kind of violence portrayed on "The Wire," the television show that gave epic dimension to the struggle over the streets of Baltimore.

These days, Detective Jones said, fewer of the victims seem to be targets, more of them casualties of reckless gunfire. Some of the veteran drug dealers, men proficient at the use of violence, have been locked up, he said. The suspects now are more careless, less streetwise. It's easier to get them to talk.

It is not a good idea to say all of this out loud, Detective Jones said, wary of jinxing things. He is genuinely nervous that the progress may be more fragile than people realize.

"It's really weird now," he said. "You have these young detectives saying there's nothing going on."

He tells them to shut up.

"It won't always be like this."

THE NURSE

At the sound of four chimes — the signal from "the box" — the nurses in the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland Medical Center prepared for a new visitor. A young man with a gunshot wound was wheeled in on a gurney. "Embarrassing," he muttered. He had accidentally shot himself in the armpit.

The trauma ward is the primary destination for people on the worst days of their lives. Patients are brought by ambulance, flown in by helicopter and in some cases dropped off on the front sidewalk. Freddie Gray spent his last days there in a coma.

Any minute, some major calamity can turn the ward into a whirlwind of activity. This has always been true. But something has changed about the gun violence cases.

"It's still happening, it's just not as severe," said CJ Meyer, 53, a senior clinical nurse who left a job at a law office for the more unforgiving demands of emergency medicine.

Several years ago, she said, people would come in with multiple gunshot wounds. Now, "they're getting shot in the arm or shot in the leg," she said. "They're not dying." And gunfire accounts for even fewer of those brought to the trauma ward by violence.

Of the 929 violent injury patients admitted in fiscal year 2023, roughly half had been shot. The rest had been stabbed or otherwise assaulted. This past year, there were 159 fewer patients, and the share with gunshot wounds had fallen to a third.

This may be partly a result of the prosecutor's crackdown on illegal gun possession. Ms. Meyer is not in a position to theorize. "We never know the stories," she said.

The medical staff's job is only to keep people alive. These days, that often means seeing people with bullet and knife injuries through surgery and rehab, making the stays for these patients longer than they used to be. But they are less likely to end with a somber notification in the family room.

THE PROSECUTOR

Michael Dunty started his job at the Baltimore prosecutor's office right after Freddie Gray's death. When he joined the homicide unit a year later, "I was handed, I don't know, maybe 10 or 12 charged homicide cases that were pending in court."

As dozens of prosecutors quit under the then-state's attorney Marilyn Mosby and trials were delayed by the pandemic, the caseload compounded. In 2022, a typical prosecutor in the unit had more than two dozen homicide cases on the court schedule, Mr. Dunty said. One handled 17 homicide jury trials in a single year. And the murders did not stop: Each prosecutor was working on 20 to 25 open investigations.

"We all recognized it wasn't sustainable," said Mr. Dunty, 51, now chief of the homicide division.

Ivan J. Bates became state's attorney in 2023, promising to hire more people and aggressively prosecute gun crimes. Since then, more than 1,500 people charged with illegal gun possession, mostly because of prior violent felonies, have been sent to prison.

In Mr. Dunty's division, prosecutors are now handling around a dozen charged cases and, in the most stunning change, only four or five open murder investigations.

"We're still seeing the same kind of types of homicides that we were over the years," Mr. Dunty said, referring to drug deals and beefs. "We're just seeing less of them."

THE MESSENGER

In certain neighborhoods, generations knew the name Dennis Wise, even though he'd be absent for nearly 40 years. Convicted of murder in 1979 — prosecutors described him as a hit man — Mr. Wise was a living urban legend. A character based on him in "The Wire" is simply named Dennis Wise.

When he was released in 2017, Mr. Wise returned to a different Baltimore. The guns were deadlier and everyone seemed to have one. Gangs from the West Coast had arrived. After the Freddie Gray protests, he said, "police were standing back and letting people kill each other."

But he was intrigued when he heard about a mentorship program called Safe Streets.

There are many elements to Mayor Brandon Scott's violence prevention plan, but most attention has focused on the Group Violence Reduction Strategy. This is based on the concept that a small group of people drive most of the violence. In weekly meetings at a Baltimore church, police officers, city employees and members of community organizations discuss people they have reason to believe are likely to be perpetrators or victims of violent crime. Members of the group visit these people, warning that they are on the city's radar but also offering services, including housing assistance and job training.

Variations of the approach have been tried in other cities and twice before in Baltimore, with mixed results. But criminologists studying the current iteration found that in the police district where it was initially put into place, violence dropped measurably.

There are other pieces to the mayor's plan, including intervention teams like Safe Streets, which has operated in Baltimore since 2007. Some of these programs rely on "credible messengers," a jargony way of saying people with a background on the streets.

Mr. Wise joined Safe Streets soon after his release. He worked out of a school building, talking to young people on the corners and mediating disputes. People listened to him, said Mr. Wise, now 75 and soft-spoken, "because they know I've been through a lot of things."

Mr. Wise's background gives him authority, but histories like his also bring the program risk. In June, a 51-year-old Safe Streets worker who had spent 10 years in prison was arrested on a federal gun charge.

To the critics of the program, Mr. Wise counters: Who else would have the trust of a young man with a gun and a grudge? "When I was coming up, in order to be safe, you had to be known to be dangerous," he said. He insisted the numbers showed that was changing.

"It's when you stop seeing people getting shot, you know you're making progress," he said.

Economy? Elections? War? No, the focus is on a lake name.

WHITE HOUSE MEMO
WASHINGTON

BY KATIE ROGERS

Americans hadn't seen President Trump in a few days, not since he diverted from an education policy event on Monday to give reporters a tour of the new helipad he is building on the South Lawn of the White House.

A curious citizen may wonder: What has Mr. Trump been up to in the days since we last saw our wartime president?

What are his priorities?

We all got an answer on Thursday, when Mr. Trump decided to take a private event, previously billed as a "Signing Time" session on his daily schedule, and make it public. He beckoned reporters into the Oval Office, where he sat next to a large poster of the Great Lakes, which were displayed alongside the words "Making The Great Lakes Even Greater."

With a flourish of his executive-order Sharpie, Mr. Trump rechristened the body of water Lake America, sticking it to the Canadians as trade negotiations continued to devolve.

This was only Mr. Trump's latest maximally patriotic (and some may say, diplomatically petty) branding exercise meant to slight an old ally. On the first day of his second term, Mr. Trump pulled out that Sharpie and — *Presto!* — turned the Gulf of Mexico into the Gulf of America, as part of a broader effort to "honor American greatness." On Thursday, Mr. Trump also mused that he would rename an ocean and complete the set.

As one of the five Great Lakes of North America, Lake Ontario didn't ask for this.

The lake existed peacefully long before humans arrived and started divvying up their shares. Now, there is a dividing line between the United States and Canada, drawn right through the pancreas-shaped body of water. Mr. Trump's executive order asserts that the deepest waters of the lake are located in the United States, along with most of the lake's volume.

Inside the Oval Office, a reporter asked Mr. Trump a question relevant to his priorities: Why target allies over adversaries?

"Well, they haven't treated us well," Mr. Trump said. "The Canadian officials have treated us very badly; they're nasty people. They charge our farmers 400 percent tariffs. They've been doing it for a long time. And I had them figured out in my first term, and I did some pretty strong things and had it getting pretty good. And then the election was rigged and now I'm coming back and doing it the way it — and finishing the job."

(Mr. Trump has repeatedly claimed that the Canadians bring exorbitant tariffs against American farmers, and those past assertions, just like this one, were misleading.)

DEMETRIUS FREEMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump signed an executive order to rename Lake Ontario as Lake America on Thursday. Canadians expressed little interest in adopting the change on their side.

Mr. Trump's rebranding-focused executive orders can direct federal agencies to adopt the new names, but other countries do not have to acknowledge the change, and the Canadians definitely do not seem interested in doing so.

"The name Lake Ontario comes from the Wendat word Ontari'io, which, appropriately, means 'the lake is beautiful, the lake is big.' The name is more than 400 years old, predating both the Confederation of Canada and the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America," Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada wrote on X — in English, and in French — in a rebuttal to Mr. Trump's decision. "We know that America is changing. Their trading relationships, their foreign policies, their national monuments, their hydronyms. Canadians also know that naming reality means calling it Lake Ontario — then, now and always."

Doug Ford, the premier of Ontario, has grown frustrated with souring trade talks and escalating lake threats in recent days, and has said the president could kiss a certain body part — the French call it a derrière. On Thursday, though, Mr. Ford issued a succinct response: "It's Lake Ontario to Canadians and the rest of the world. Now and forever."

And so goes another Thursday in the doldrums of Mr. Trump's August, when he has poked his head up long enough to cause a diplomatic disturbance before retreating out of the public eye to turn to other pressing matters.

On his Air Force One flight to a (private) Republican National Committee event in Houston, Mr. Trump kept the public updated on staffing — Ben Moss is the new White House staff secretary — and his thoughts on presidential performance.

He posted a graphic of past presidents next to rankings ranging from "THE GREATEST" (take a wild guess) to "FAILURES" (now take another one).

He posted an image declaring that the war in Iran was "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" — not quite true — and he congratulated Nvidia on a record sales year.

He eventually circled back to the matter of renaming the lake, posting a letter from Dr. Ned Mamula, the director of the U.S. Geological Survey, who told him that his wish had been granted.

"The change will begin occurring in printed documents over the next several days," Dr. Mamula wrote.

Mr. Trump's job approval rating has reached record lows.

The war he began against Iran turned six months old on Friday, which is about five months longer than he had originally promised.

And old allies — the Canadians, of all people — are growing comfortable showing greater degrees of defiance in the face of Mr. Trump's threat.

But at least this mission, this matter of renaming a lake, was accomplished.

Business

Trump pours billions into batteries

WASHINGTON

He disdains clean tech, but with storage critical for A.I., he's investing heavily

BY BRAD PLUMER

President Trump has been scornful of electric cars for years. But his administration is now pouring billions of dollars into the battery technology that powers them.

Large lithium-ion batteries have become one of the rare energy technologies that both parties in Washington strongly support — though for very different reasons.

The Biden administration saw batteries as a green energy tool crucial for addressing global warming and sought to encourage manufacturing them, for use in electric vehicles and to backstop wind and solar power on electric grids. The Trump administration has rolled back efforts to expand clean energy, but officials have nonetheless come to see batteries as essential for many of Mr. Trump's priorities, including powering A.I. data centers and manufacturing drones for the military.

The Trump administration has been particularly alarmed by China's dominance of global supply chains for lithium-ion batteries and in recent months has made a major push to bolster domestic production of many battery components and associated critical minerals.

"There has been a growing appreciation for just how important batteries are for so many things," said Tom Moerenhout, who leads the critical minerals initiative at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy in New York. "It's not just E.V.s, it's automation, robotics, data centers, drones for defense. And there's a real move to making sure China doesn't have a choke point here."

This month, the U.S. Energy Department awarded $500 million to seven companies that make battery components or process critical minerals like cobalt in the United States. Earlier this month, the Pentagon announced a $1.4 billion loan to an advanced battery startup building a factory in Washington State. Federal agencies are funding various domestic efforts to produce graphite and lithium, two raw materials for batteries.

"For too long, America has depended on foreign actors for critical materials essential to modern life that underpin our economy, energy security, and national security," Energy Secretary Chris Wright said in announcing the battery awards.

Still, loosening China's grip on the global battery industry could be difficult without boosting the domestic market for electric cars, which are by far the largest source of demand for lithium-ion batteries, experts said. Last year, Republicans in Congress repealed a $7,500 tax credit for consumers to buy electric cars with U.S.-made components, which provided a significant incentive for domestic battery manufacturing.

"If you really want to onshore supply chains, you need electric vehicles — it's as simple as that," said Dr. Moerenhout. "The defense sector alone is just too small to underwrite a full supply chain for batteries."

For years, the Chinese government has made a concerted effort to lead the world in electric vehicles and heavily subsidize its battery industry. The country now sells roughly as many E.V.s each year as the rest of the world combined, and it has become the pre-eminent producer of lithium iron phosphate batteries, or LFP, which have become widespread in electric vehicles and stationary storage. The country also dominates the refining of raw materials like lithium and graphite and the production of key components like cathodes and anodes.

Many officials in Washington have been eager to reduce dependence on China for national security reasons. The U.S. military uses batteries in lasers, hand-held radios, night vision goggles, satellites and drones, and Chinese components are still needed to make many of these items. Data centers for artificial intelligence are increasingly using lithium-ion batteries for backup power.

China recognizes the leverage it has. Last fall, amid a period of trade tensions, the country threatened to limit exports of a range of battery materials, including graphite, which businesses said would have devastated the nascent U.S. battery industry.

GRANT HINDSLEY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gene Berdichevsky of Sila Nanotechnologies, at the battery company's new plant, above. The company received a conditional $1.4 billion loan commitment from the Trump administration. Right, an array of batteries at Jupiter Power in Houston.

BRANDON THIBODEAUX FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

When Mr. Trump returned to office, his administration initially froze billions of dollars in Biden-era grants for battery manufacturing, grouping batteries in with electric vehicles, solar farms, wind turbines and other clean energy technologies that officials wanted to downplay.

But that stance quickly shifted.

While the administration has throttled funding for other clean-energy technologies the Energy Department has allowed many Biden-era grants for battery makers to proceed. The government has also invested in firms that develop battery components or critical minerals, including Eos, a next-generation battery company.

The Trump administration has also been more active than the Biden administration in encouraging U.S. mining, and the government has begun taking direct financial stakes in mining companies. That has prompted pushback from Democrats in Congress, who have called for investigations into some mining deals and raised questions about conflicts of interest.

Earlier this month, Mr. Trump held an event at the White House with mining executives and announced more than $2 billion in funding to help revitalize the domestic mining industry, including for battery materials.

That included a $1.4 billion loan from the Pentagon's Office of Strategic Capital to Sila Nanotechnologies, a company that has developed a type of lithium-ion battery that uses silicon materials instead of Chinese graphite.

The company has spent nearly 15 years developing its technology, and its factory in Moses Lake, Wash., can now make enough material for tens of thousands of batteries each year. But that's still only enough to supply less than 0.1 percent of the global market, and Sila is hoping to expand production drastically, while competing against ferocious Chinese competition.

"It takes an immense amount of time and effort to expand and do this right," said Gene Berdichevsky, the chief executive of Sila. "And for investors to bet on that, they need confidence that we have the right policies to support this kind of industry and not just let it go offshore."

The administration's moves could end up benefiting electric vehicles and other clean energy industries, too, all of which are increasingly demanding batteries. Large battery installations on the electric grid, which can help smooth out fluctuations in wind and solar power, have increased 70 percent annually over the past three years.

Although a growing number of factories in the United States now manufacture battery modules and cells — in large part because of a Biden-era clean energy law that provided lucrative incentives — the country is still far behind in mining and processing the raw materials that go into those batteries.

In other awards announced by the Energy Department this month, Lilac Solutions will receive up to $100 million for a facility that will extract lithium from the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Jervois, a company that owns a cobalt deposit in Idaho, will get up to $100 million to build the nation's first cobalt refinery to produce materials for batteries and weapons.

What a way she made a living

Dolly Parton's vision for a range of enterprises was ahead of her time

BY KIM BHASIN

"Well, can you believe — 40 years here?" Dolly Parton said last year after she emerged from a giant pink cake to celebrate the anniversary of Dollywood, her popular theme park. "Hooray for Dollywood, right?"

Dollywood, in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., has served as a beacon for all-things-Dolly for decades, the centerpiece of a business empire that preceded most of its celebrity peers. Yet beyond the roller coasters, bumper cars and country music museum, Ms. Parton's legacy — she died on Tuesday, at 80 — includes setting the foundations for what a modern celebrity brand could become.

Over her six-decade singing and entertainment career, Ms. Parton built a range of enterprises that spanned retail, hospitality, food, publishing and consumer goods, long before the age of influencers and the products they now sell. A musical about her life is set to begin previews on Broadway in December.

Celebrity brands have proliferated, whether they're underwear sold by a reality television star, tequila backed by an Academy Award-winning actor or sneakers from a basketball legend. It has become common to see a celebrity's name on a new funding announcement for a start-up. Decades earlier, Ms. Parton began formulating a plan that would transform her from a country singer to a cultural mainstay whose businesses are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ms. Parton got her start as a businesswoman in the 1960s when she teamed up with two of her uncles, Bill and Louis Owens, on Owepar, a publishing company that controlled and managed their music and copyrights.

In 1982, Ms. Parton told Barbara Walters in an interview that she had a vision that looked past music and entertainment and said she wanted to keep close control of her intellectual property. Average people wanted a piece of her, and she could provide that through new businesses.

"I'm in a good place now, but also I want to get into areas of business," Ms. Parton said as she shared her blueprint for Dollywood and beyond. She added, "And I'm going into cosmetics and probably start a line of clothes for the average American public, like to be sold at Kmarts or places where people can feel like they can have something with somebody's name on it."

Her music and larger-than-life persona provided the gravitational center for her brands to orbit. She dabbled in television as a founder of Sandollar Productions, the film and TV studio that produced "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." In 1995, she founded Imagination Library, a nonprofit that gives books to children.

Later in life, Ms. Parton supercharged her efforts as a business mogul. Retailers clamored for connections with beloved celebrities like her as they watched brands like Jessica Alba's Honest Company and Ryan Reynolds's Mint Mobile take off.

Ms. Parton signed a series of brand partnerships across several industries. Dolly Parton cake mixes with Duncan Hines hit the shelves at Walmart, Holly Dolly sugar cookies and patchwork aprons appeared at Williams Sonoma stores and country fried steak meals entered freezers at ShopRite.

She sold Dolly's Joleans denim with Good American, butterfly jewelry with Kendra Scott, and a line of dog toys and accessories made in collaboration with SportPet Designs: Doggy Parton.

Yet with all the national allure, Ms. Parton's presence has been most prevalent in her home state, Tennessee.

Dollywood has grown to attract more than three million visitors per year, according to the Themed Entertainment Association, and Belmont University in Nashville has Dolly U, with courses that include documentary editing, songwriting and market research.

The Nashville skyline now includes Ms. Parton's SongTeller Hotel. The 12-story hotel contains the Life of Many Colors Museum, which follows Ms. Parton's life journey, and is set to open in the fall, with the promise of providing fans a "hub of music, style and hospitality designed the Dolly-way."

In a recent interview with People, Ms. Parton said she was especially proud of an upcoming release in collaboration with the Community Coffee brand, called Cup of Ambition.

"That's a dream I've had for over 40 years, ever since I wrote the line about 'cup of ambition' in my song '9 to 5,'" Ms. Parton told People. "But, you know, some dreams take longer to come to life than others."

ROB DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES

Dolly Parton in 1993 at Dollywood, the amusement park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., that has served as a beacon for all-things-Dolly and the center of Ms. Parton's business empire.

Both friend and foe in an A.I. race

SAN FRANCISCO

Meta publicly criticized Anthropic, but it's also one of its largest customers

BY ELI TAN AND KALLEY HUANG

Mark Zuckerberg, Meta's chief executive, recently took aim at rival Anthropic.

Without naming the artificial intelligence start-up or its chief executive, Dario Amodei, Mr. Zuckerberg said leading A.I. labs were trying to consolidate power while they painted the future as "filled with doom."

"If those labs lead," he wrote in a 6,500-word essay published this month, "then the balance of power will favor larger institutions over individuals."

But even as Mr. Zuckerberg publicly criticized Anthropic, his own company had privately helped its rival to rise in power.

Behind the scenes, Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, has become a heavy user of Anthropic's A.I. products — so much so that it has turned into one of Anthropic's largest customers, according to five people with knowledge of the companies.

At one point this year, Meta internally projected that it could spend as much as $10 billion annually on Anthropic's A.I. models, said two of the people, who declined to be identified discussing private information. That would have formed a major chunk of Anthropic's yearly revenue, which the start-up estimated in July would pass $65 billion.

Meta and Anthropic have long competed, but the extent to which they are financially intertwined has not been previously reported. Their situation offers a window into the friend-foe relationships permeating Silicon Valley's A.I. race, in which tech titans can bad mouth rivals in public while giving them billions of dollars behind the scenes.

Among the frenemies of the A.I. start-ups are Google and Amazon, which have committed to investing $73 billion in Anthropic, even as they develop their own A.I. models. Microsoft was one of OpenAI's earliest investors, but the companies now highlight their independence from each other. The chipmaker Nvidia has multibillion-dollar partnerships with Meta and Google, even as those companies work on their own chips.

Meta's relationship with Anthropic appears especially convoluted.

Meta is so reliant on Anthropic's A.I. models that it has used them to power and test a coming A.I. product called Hatch, four people familiar with the matter said. Mr. Zuckerberg has described Hatch as Meta's next breakthrough, a personal "agent" that works "24/7 on your behalf to help achieve your goals and improve your life, your health, your relationships, your finances."

Meta cut back on some Anthropic spending this summer, but is still spending hundreds of millions of dollars a month on the start-up's tools, two people with knowledge of the matter said.

Meta's leaders are aware their spending could affect Anthropic as the start-up heads toward a blockbuster initial public offering that could value it at $2 trillion, two people with knowledge of the company said. Nat Friedman, Meta's head of A.I. product, has told some employees that if Meta uses only its own coding tools or ones from OpenAI, it could lower Anthropic's revenue before its public offering, the people said.

Meta and Anthropic declined to comment. (The New York Times has sued OpenAI and Microsoft, claiming copyright infringement of news content related to A.I. systems. The two companies have denied the suit's claims.)

Meta spent much of last summer trying to poach A.I. researchers from rivals by dangling nine-figure compensation packages. While it hired some high-profile A.I. researchers from OpenAI and Google, it largely failed to recruit from Anthropic, three people with knowledge of the companies said.

Meta's spending with Anthropic surged at the beginning of the year, when its engineers started heavily using Claude Code, Anthropic's popular A.I. coding tool. By April, Meta employees were competing on internal leaderboards to see who could use the most Anthropic "tokens," which are units of A.I. use roughly equal to a word fragment.

Around this time, Meta executives discussed the $10 billion spending projection on Anthropic. But as token costs skyrocketed, Meta removed the token leaderboards.

Meta has since released an update to its coding A.I. tool, Muse Code, which its employees are increasingly using instead of Anthropic's tools. And the product that will publicly debut will be powered by Meta's latest A.I. model, one person with knowledge of the matter said.

Erin Griffith and Sri Muppidi contributed reporting from San Francisco.

KARSTEN MORAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

JASON HENRY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

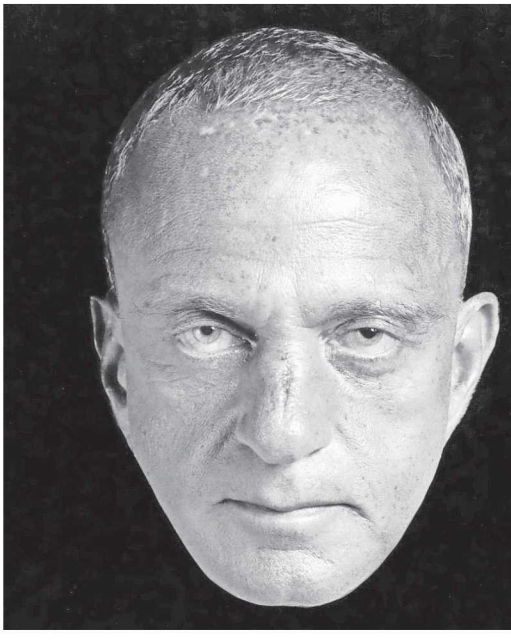
Dario Amodei, left, the chief executive of Anthropic, and Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive of Meta. Meta projected that it could spend billions annually on Anthropic.

BUSINESS

Link to Trump leads to book cover rejection

Wary of fallout, foundation refuses to license eerie photo of president's mentor

BY MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM



ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

BILL ALLEN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

MARILYNN K. YEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise from left: Robert Mapplethorpe's photograph of Roy Cohn, from 1981; Mr. Mapplethorpe in his studio in 1981; and Donald J. Trump with Mr. Cohn, then his lawyer, in 1984, announcing a billion-dollar lawsuit against the National Football League.

It is an arresting, menacing image: the scarred face of Roy M. Cohn, the notorious New York City lawyer, fixer and master of the political dark arts, floating bodiless in a pool of black, his hooded eyes staring directly back at the viewer.

The photograph, taken by Robert Mapplethorpe in 1981, is an unforgettable depiction of its subject, and the celebrated author Kai Bird thought it would make the perfect cover art for his new biography of Mr. Cohn, "American Scoundrel," which will be released by Scribner this coming week.

That the picture never ended up on the book's cover is a matter of regret to Mr. Bird — and a small but telling illustration of the anxiety that has taken root in the nonprofit world because of Mr. Cohn's most famed protégé, an ambitious real estate developer now serving his second term as president.

President Trump loomed large in the decision by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, which administers the artist's estate and catalog, to decline the request to license the photograph, according to three people familiar with its deliberations.

Mr. Mapplethorpe, who died in 1989, is widely remembered for fighting censorship. In this case, the foundation's board feared that Mr. Trump could retaliate, perhaps by threatening its nonprofit tax status, if the president — who has used the levers of government to pressure universities, law firms and TV networks — were to take offense, the people said.

As a charitable organization, the Mapplethorpe Foundation is legally prohibited from engaging in certain political activities. Mr. Bird's book is subtitled "Roy Cohn's Dark Journey From Joe McCarthy to Donald Trump," and the board was concerned that the photo's inclusion could be construed as a kind of political act, the people said.

It would not be the first time that a cultural organization has been alarmed by the president's hardball tactics — some of which he honed under Mr. Cohn, who prosecuted Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and aided Senator Joseph McCarthy in his witch hunt for communists.

Mr. Trump has demanded changes at the Smithsonian and taken control of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He has threatened to strip Harvard of its tax-exempt status. Nonprofit groups, like the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Democratic fund-raising platform ActBlue, have been investigated by his Justice Department.

Mr. Bird, whose 2005 biography of Robert Oppenheimer, "American Prometheus," was adapted into the Oscar-winning Christopher Nolan film, said in an interview that he was "thunderstruck" and "outraged" when he learned that the Mapplethorpe Foundation had declined to license the portrait. "It's astonishing that these people are being so cowed, so easily," he said.

In his biography of Mr. Cohn, Mr. Bird writes that the foundation's decision was "yet another example of Roy's ghost haunting us from the grave."

The Mapplethorpe Foundation declined to comment on Mr. Bird's criticisms.

Mr. Mapplethorpe started the foundation shortly before his death "to protect his work, to advance his creative vision and to promote the causes he cared about," according to the foundation's website.

His photography, which explicitly depicted the sexual lives of gay men, was the subject of several well-publicized battles over free expression.

When the matter of Mr. Bird's biography arose last year, the artist's foundation made a different calculus. Its board determined that any kind of government retaliation could drain its financial resources, creating an existential risk for the organization, according to the people familiar with the board's decision-making. And while the biography may have brought attention to Mr. Mapplethorpe's work, the photo would ultimately be in service of one author's commercial endeavor.

Several First Amendment lawyers, none of whom were involved in the foundation's discussions, said the use of a photograph for a scholarly biography would not typically constitute political activity. But the lawyers acknowledged that it was difficult to ignore the uneasy atmosphere the Trump administration has created.

"The idea that a photograph of a dead mobster lawyer could somehow qualify as political activity, even under the Trump administration, is hard to fathom," said Suzanne Nossel, a former chief executive of the free expression group PEN America. "And yet, we're in an environment where no one feels they can rule anything out."

The photograph itself has a colorful history.

In 1981, Andy Warhol dispatched Steven M.L. Aronson, a writer and book editor, to conduct a Q&A with Mr. Cohn for an issue of Interview magazine, Mr. Warhol's arts and culture publication. By then, Mr. Cohn was a New York celebrity: a power player who partied at Studio 54 and represented moguls, mobsters and media barons.

Mr. Aronson persuaded Mr. Cohn to pose for Mr. Mapplethorpe, a friend whose work was still relatively obscure. Their meeting was an unusual encounter between an artist who celebrated the lives of gay men and a closeted lawyer whose anti-gay virulence would later be depicted in the Tony Kushner play "Angels in America."

Both Mr. Cohn and Mr. Mapplethorpe would die from AIDS complications before the decade's end.

Mr. Cohn adored the photograph of himself, and later dined with Mr. Mapplethorpe and Mr. Aronson at the downtown New York restaurant Raoul's. "He loved publicity, for one thing," Mr. Aronson recalled of Mr. Cohn, "and the photograph was glamorous, as evil often is."

For the cover of "American Scoundrel," Mr. Bird and his publisher ultimately settled on a portrait by the photographer Britain Hill, showing Mr. Cohn in a blue pinstriped suit with his hands folded beneath his chin.

He is still staring directly at the viewer.

Faster than Bolt. Not useful in a factory.

Chinese robots' prowess in sports may not transfer into practical applications

BY YAN ZHUANG

LINTAO ZHANG/GETTY IMAGES

Above, a robot catching fire during a 100-meter sprint at the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing. Usain Bolt had no such problems when he set the world record in 2009. Robots are "capable in very specific and somewhat contrived events," one expert said.

OLIVIER MORIN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

In 2009, Usain Bolt set the men's 100-meter dash world record of 9.58 seconds at the World Athletics Championships in Berlin. This month, a humanoid robot developed by the Chinese company X-Humanoid beat that record by 0.19 seconds, according to Chinese state media. The robot ended its sprint by slamming full speed into a padded wall, falling down and being carried away by human assistants.

High-profile feats of robotic athleticism have become increasingly common in China, where a humanoid robotics industry has flourished, aided by generous state support and billions in investment.

At the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing last weekend, robots boxed and participated in soccer matches. One played tennis against a human opponent, moving across the court and angling itself to return volleys. Earlier this year, a robot ran a marathon faster than any human in history.

But what do these robotic superhuman feats amount to?

"Most of the sports the humanoids are doing don't directly translate into utility for many of the mundane tasks people are trying to get humanoids to perform, like being useful around the house," said Michael Milford, a professor and director of the robotics center at Queensland University of Technology in Australia.

The robots are "capable in very specific and somewhat contrived events," he said.

Chinese media has also acknowledged the gulf between athleticism and real-world applications.

"A factory robot does not need to win a sprint, nor does a service robot need a medal," read a commentary in Xinhua, the state news agency. "But every gain in speed, stability and precision on the competition floor can bring robots one step closer to becoming genuinely useful beyond it."

Even without significant and proven real-world applications, these high-profile displays and the attention they have attracted are already paying some dividends. Unitree Robotics — a humanoid robotics company whose videos of robots performing kung fu, kickboxing and back flips have attracted millions of views online — debuted on the Shanghai stock market this month. Its shares ended their first day of trading up by more than 460 percent.

Alan Fern, a robotics professor at Oregon State University, was part of a research team that set the Guinness World Record for the fastest 100-meter run by a robot on two legs in 2022. That robot ran it in 24.73 seconds. To go from that, in four years, to X-Humanoid's 9.39 seconds was an "enormous achievement," he said.

But he noted that robotics companies have become relatively experienced in making robots that can run, jump and do acrobatics in controlled environments. He added that incremental improvements in these sports are mostly related to developing better hardware and refining the controls, rather than any significant technological breakthrough.

The robot at the games in Beijing that could play tennis was more impressive, he said, because that involved interacting with something unpredictable.

Most robots struggle in situations where they need to adapt to changing situations. Yet the tennis robot had to track a ball, decide where to move, coordinate its body and time the strike.

The robots are still far from perfect, with accidents abounding at the games. Robots fell down, sparked small fires and crashed into objects, according to videos of the event. Many of the racing robots did not seem capable of slowing down on their own and instead stopped by running into a padded barrier.

The vision of humanoid robots eventually being able to do anything a human can do is still far away, Mr. Fern said.

"Outside entertainment and a limited number of tightly constrained industrial settings, these robots do not yet have the general-purpose intelligence and reliability needed to operate in messy real-world environments," he said.

The vision of humanoid robots' eventually being able to do anything a human can do is still far away.

Mr. Milford said that it could take many years before robots can safely and reliably perform in everyday settings.

He drew a comparison to self-driving cars: Three or four decades ago, a self-driving car could drive across a continent on highways. But only in recent years has the technology become advanced and safe enough for such cars to be deployed widely.

Car racing may be another good analogy, Mr. Fern said. "We still marvel at the engineering achievements in Formula 1, and some of those advances eventually transfer elsewhere, but we do not interpret every faster lap as a revolution in transportation," he said.

"Similarly, beating Usain Bolt does not mean that the robot has surpassed humans at locomotion in any general sense," he added.

Mr. Bolt did not respond to a request for comment.

Siyi Zhao contributed research.

Pancreatic cancer drug raises some larger hopes

BY REBECCA ROBBINS
AND CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval this past week of a new drug for pancreatic cancer marked the end of a long quest to develop a medicine that can hit one of cancer's most elusive targets.

Researchers hope the new drug is just the beginning, opening a new chapter in treatment for a range of cancer types.

At least 79 drugs that take a similar approach are being tested in 238 clinical trials worldwide, according to one tally by academic researchers.

Large drugmakers like Eli Lilly, Pfizer, Amgen and AstraZeneca are among the companies racing to develop their own medicines that work like the new drug, daraxonrasib, which is made by Revolution Medicines and will be sold as Rasonque.

The new drug, taken as two daily pills, attacks a mutated cellular protein called KRAS. It has long been an enticing target, because it fuels nearly all pancreatic cancers, as well as many lung and colon cancers and some other tumor types. But for years, the smooth-surfaced KRAS protein was considered impossible to attack, because it lacked an obvious toehold for a drug to exploit.

But a series of scientific advances gradually overturned that doctrine, showing that KRAS could be conquered. Starting around 2024, research activity in the field exploded.

"This is not just pancreatic cancer," said Dr. David S. Hong, an oncologist at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and one of the leaders of an early safety study of daraxonrasib.

Cancer is a slippery foe that often finds a way to evade one particular therapy, and there's hope that treating it with multiple approaches simultaneously could help squelch tumors. Already, studies are underway that test combinations of KRAS-targeting drugs alongside other types of therapies to launch a multipronged attack. Daraxonrasib's approval could lead to more such trials.

Researchers widely agree that the emerging class of drugs "will need combinations to advance their clinical response and durability," said Channing Der, a pioneering KRAS scientist who oversees academic labs in North Carolina and Berlin that have been tracking experimental drugs and trials in the field.

Revolution Medicines, a small company near San Francisco that had no approved products before daraxonrasib, is widely seen as the leader in the field. One of its most closely watched, and potentially most significant, trials is testing daraxonrasib as the first drug given after a pancreatic cancer diagnosis, instead of as a second-line treatment for people who had already tried chemotherapy, the group for which the drug won approval.

Revolution is also developing a similar medicine, zoldonrasib, that has shown early promise for lung cancer. The company also has collaborations underway with drugmakers like Bristol Myers Squibb, Tango Therapeutics and Summit Therapeutics to study combinations involving its KRAS-targeting drugs.

Daraxonrasib is not the first to target KRAS. Two others, sold by Amgen and Bristol Myers Squibb, won approval to treat forms of lung cancer several years ago. But those drugs delivered only modest benefits. Tumors rapidly mutated to evade the treatment.

KRAS is part of a family of proteins that develop mutations in about a fifth of human cancers.

Take breast cancer, for example. KRAS mutations are very rare in breast tumors, but when the breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body, like the lungs or the liver, and develops a resistance to treatment, it can sometimes develop KRAS mutations.

Researchers now hope to plan a clinical trial that would test the approach in breast cancer, said Ariella Hanker of the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, one of the scientists involved in the work.

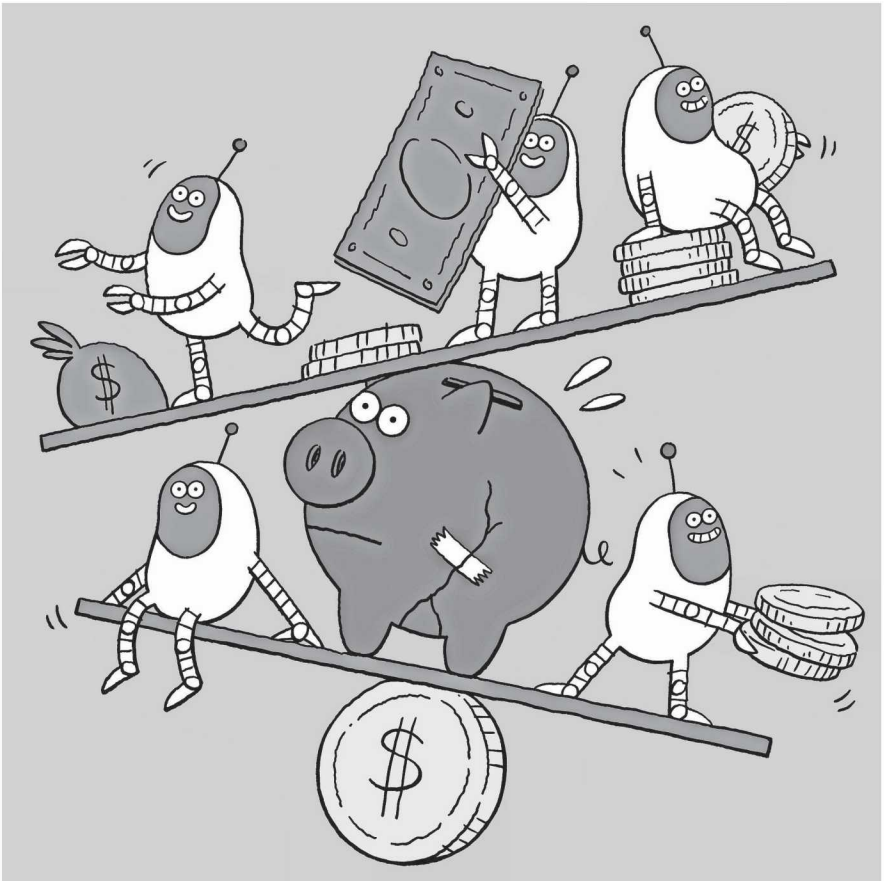
One drugmaker, Erasca, has generated attention for early stage studies of its KRAS-targeting drug, ERAS-0015, in cancers of the lung and pancreas. That experimental drug is similar to daraxonrasib — so similar, in fact, that, in a letter last spring, Revolution Medicines's lawyers accused its competitor of violating a key patent and demanded that it stop work on the drug in the United States. Erasca, which is based in San Diego and bought the rights to its experimental drug from a Chinese company, has denied the accusations.

Opinion

How the A.I. debt binge sinks the global economy

The A.I.-fueled debt bubble will likely result in a painful downturn.

Robin Wigglesworth



NADINE REDLICH

Despite all the hoopla about Nvidia becoming the first company valued at over $5 trillion, the listing of Elon Musk's SpaceX and the looming initial public offerings of Anthropic and OpenAI, artificial intelligence is no longer primarily a stock market story. It is a story of debt, and that should worry us. Unfortunately, manias fueled mainly by credit almost inevitably end badly.

For now, set aside both prognostications of an A.I.-powered economic miracle or an A.I.-generated "jobsmageddon." No one really knows just how impactful the age of thinking machines will prove — the technology is simply too different from anything that has come before. It famously took a long time for the computer age to appear in economic data, too.

But we do have a lot of experience with debt-fueled investment sprees, such as the railway euphoria of the 19th century, the telecommunications revolution of the 20th century and more recently the 21st century housing boom. They all resulted in nasty economic downturns, even if the underlying technology proved transformative.

Why has debt become so central to A.I.? Previously, most investments in data centers and related infrastructure were paid for by the abundant cash flows generated by the likes of Facebook or Google Search. But large-scale A.I. models depend on immense computing power. And the resulting scope of the investments required to build that power is increasingly forcing the "hyperscalers" — the small club of companies that are aggressively ramping up their A.I. data center investments — to turn to loans, bonds and sundry other forms of financial obligations to pay for the party.

The debt binge is astounding even industry insiders.

Last year, analysts at Barclays, the British bank, collected a string of unsourced quotes from an A.I. data center conference they attended, which ranged from "enjoy the ride on a rocket without seatbelts" to the "best way to describe the market is bonkers."

Since then, things have become even more bonkers. American A.I. companies had already tapped debt markets for $217 billion last year, according to Morgan Stanley. By mid-August, they had already smashed past this total, with $445 billion of debt issued, and the investment bank expects the overall debt splurge to hit nearly $600 billion for 2026. That is more than the combined 2026 budgets for the Departments of Justice, Transportation and Education.

And that is just the start, judging by what the hyperscalers have told investors. Their future capital expenditure plans amount to roughly 3 percent of U.S. G.D.P. a year, in 2027 to 2029, according to calculations by Torsten Slok, the chief economist of Apollo, an investment firm. Back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that's almost $1 trillion a year. It also would, in relative terms, represent a larger and faster relative ramp-up than even that of U.S. residential housing in the years preceding the 2008 crash.

In other words, if 2025's A.I. frenzy was merely bonkers, we are now entering the territory of bonkers squared — or perhaps even bonkers cubed.

For the most part, investors do not seem worried yet. The dot-com bubble and bust is often seen as the best parallel to the current A.I. boom, feeding hopes that the economic fallout from a bust will prove manageable. The U.S. stock market lost almost half its value between the 2000 peak and 2003 trough, but the U.S. economy suffered only a mild, brief setback. And, ultimately, computers did revolutionize the world.

It's tempting to expect the A.I. boom to play out in a similar way, unleashing immense prosperity. After all, the hyperscalers enjoy vastly profitable core businesses, so perhaps they will be able to easily handle their debts.

But there are reasons to worry. Technology companies that were lean, mean money-generation machines have abruptly become voracious devourers of capital. To take just one example of the dramatic swing in fortunes, Google's free cash flows went negative for the first time ever in the second quarter of 2026, after cumulatively generating almost $600 billion since the listing in 2004.

Then there is the issue of more obscure liabilities. Bond sales are easily tracked and the debt transparently reported on a company's balance sheet for everyone to see. But the hyperscalers are becoming more financially creative and are increasingly keeping the debt off their books by structuring their data center investments as lease commitments.

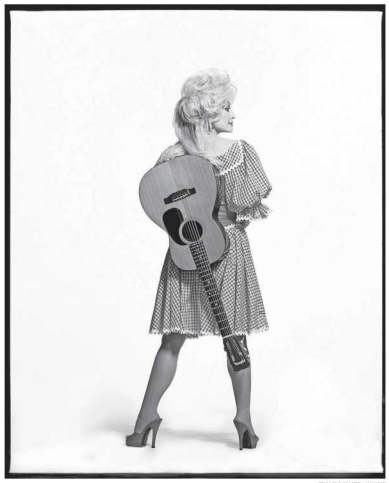
Take Meta's titanic Hyperion data center project in Louisiana, for example. Instead of issuing bonds, the company secured most of the financing money by promising to rent the data center itself for 20 years. As a result, the $27.3 billion loan appears nowhere on

WIGGLESWORTH, PAGE 10

The greatest story Dolly Parton ever wrote was herself

She didn't see herself as a saint; she identified as something we needed even more: a writer.

Tressie McMillan Cottom



TIMOTHY WHITE/AUGUST

Loving Dolly Rebecca Parton was easy. She was beautiful, funny and kind. Rumor has it that she was a prankster who could tell a good dirty joke. She was a country music original, a glittering pop star, a scene-stealing actress, a cultural icon and an unparalleled humanitarian. By the final decade of her 60-plus-year career, loving her had become something of a public sacrament. But Dolly didn't see herself as a saint; she identified as something we needed even more: a writer.

Despite the way we all loved Dolly, I don't think that many of us ever really understood that about her. We hung on to the stories she told us about how she grew up with a lot of love and not much money. We knew that she revered her father and honored her mother. We knew she told Elvis Presley he could not own the rights to one of her songs and that, amazingly, the King didn't seem to hold it against her. We knew that she wanted kids to read and queer people to be celebrated and country people to feel seen.

She told these stories so often and with so much authenticity that most of us don't realize these are the only stories that she really told us about herself. It was the repetition over 60 years, albeit in different registers, with different deliveries, that made her endlessly beloved yet dazzlingly impenetrable. It's a good writer's sleight of hand.

To understand Dolly, you have to read her as a writer. Writing her own story was the most radical, precise way to define herself in a world that kept trying to fit her into a box. She was not simply Southern, not simply country. She was from Appalachia — a place that is just as mythologized, mocked and misunderstood as Dolly was. It's a place where people are rarely allowed to speak for themselves. Instead, they are interpolated through coastal biases about white trash and red states. If they are lucky, Appalachians are stereotyped as hillbillies new to the modern world. Too racist to be redeemed. Too dumb to be a problem if they aren't.

The story Dolly wrote about herself across thousands of songs and performances and books was a counternarrative about Appalachia. She narrated it as a place filled with soaring mountains and narrow hollers, geological wonders and distinctive cultures, abundant love and generational poverty.

Appalachian people are used to city folk making fun of them. It's easy to forget that Dolly was not exempt from this sort of mockery. For most of her career, men made cracks about her figure. Women made digs about her lowbrow fashion. Critics often downplayed her artistry. No matter how famous she got, how many new audiences fell in love with her, how undeniable her talent, how ridiculous her work ethic, Dolly had to waste time with stupid jokes from small minds.

When people underestimated Dolly for looking like "the town tramp," as she put it, she embraced it. In 2009 she told Morley Safer, "By the time they think that I don't know what's going on, I've done got the money and gone." We call that particular trick country dumb where I am from. Dolly was a master at it.

Make fun of her cleavage? You better tell a funnier gag than one she already told about herself. Want to look down on her about being parochial? You will have to square that with her outstanding business acumen. At a time when women and poor people signed away their intellectual property for a shot at stardom, Dolly started a series of successful publishing companies to retain her rights.

That's not to say that Dolly's pride, especially in her craft, didn't shine through. Her indefatigable sense of herself as a creative person, with the right to make her art as she saw fit, came from her sense of place. She crafted stories in the rhyme, meter, poetry and politics of Appalachia. Her interpretations of bluegrass may be among my favorites, especially when she met her creative match in Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris. The

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OPINION

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China is already the winner in the U.S.-Canada trade war

Chad P. Bown

The keenest observer of the all-out trade war between the United States and Canada is surely President Xi Jinping of China. If Washington doesn't change course, he's probably going to be its winner, too.

Mr. Xi already has monopoly power over components that are vital to hundreds of thousands of American and Canadian jobs. His April 2025 restrictions on rare-earth magnets temporarily shut down a Ford Explorer plant in Chicago. In Ontario later that year, Honda briefly reduced and suspended production of Civics and CR-Vs after he closed off access to semiconductors, which disrupted parts supply.

These sorts of attacks and those sorts of vulnerabilities should bring allies together. In a normal world, Washington and Ottawa would be laser focused on how much and how quickly they could manufacture together to prevent that kind of Chinese economic coercion.

Instead, President Trump has framed his tussle with Canada as a fight over how much manufacturing the country should be prepared to yield to the United States. And Mr. Trump wants almost all of it.

Beijing is the real problem, and Washington needs all the allies it can find.

Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada walked away from Mr. Trump's latest offer and then escalated with fresh tariffs. Former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was correct to say it was even "a bad deal for the United States."

Mr. Trump cannot allow Canada to abandon the negotiations. Like it or not, Washington needs a resilient Canadian manufacturing sector working in concert with America's companies in the much bigger and more consequential battle against Chinese market dominance.

Ottawa rebuffed Mr. Trump's latest offer in part because it retained too many of his import tariffs on Canadian cars, heavy trucks, steel and aluminum. With tariffs that high, Americans will eventually stop buying Canadian-assembled vehicles, and Detroit will rework its supply chains to exclude Canadian parts. Cars and parts once moved seamlessly across the U.S.-Canada border between suppliers and buyers, much as they did over the U.S.-Mexico border.

Being shut out of the market next door will devastate the Canadian auto industry. Canada is not close enough to Asia or Europe to survive as part of their supply chains.

We know what will probably happen next based on what took place in Australia after its automakers disappeared. By 2017, Toyota, General Motors and Ford closed their last Australian plants and caved to economic reality: The Australian market was too small and too remote to support the scale needed for globally competitive manufacturing.

Australians at first imported cars from manufacturing hubs across Japan, Korea, Thailand, Europe and the United States. Less than 10 years later, Australia looks very different. Nearly one in three new cars bought in Australia in the first half of 2026 was made in China, up from less than one in 250 back in 2017. (Only one in 50 Australian purchases in the first five months of 2026 was made in the United States.)

Mr. Trump should expect Canadian consumers to go the same route. In January, Mr. Carney announced Canada would allow 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles to be sold in the country — less than 3 percent of new car sales — and would slowly increase that number. Any decision to further open the Canadian market would probably lead to a Chinese import surge.

Why is pure Econ 101. Buying higher-cost cars from the United States is easier to justify politically when there are offsetting benefits to the national economy, such as assembly jobs, profits to domestic parts suppliers and communities built around steel or aluminum plants. If local manufacturing disappears, so will the reasons for Canadians to accept paying higher prices.

Losing Canadian customers to China would be terrible for America for two reasons.

First, the total number of buyers matters for sectors such as automobiles, which have high fixed costs and substantial barriers to new entrants. Having more consumers means companies can learn how to lower costs and offer reduced prices to get even more customers. Losing Canadian car buyers will be one more step toward ceding the global automotive industry to China.

Today, Chinese companies sell low-priced cars. Tomorrow, the country could weaponize its newfound monopoly power. China also once offered the world great deals on rare-earth magnets and low-end semiconductors. Those prices allowed it to accumulate the market dominance that ultimately gave Mr. Xi the capacity to cut off Ford, Honda and many others last year.

China has increasing market shares in sectors such as steel, aluminum, shipbuilding and telecommunications equipment. A recent O.E.C.D. report suggested that 60 percent of China's global market share gains since 2005 could be attributed to its policy of supporting industries with generous subsidies.

Second, losing the Canadian commercial base could turn away, once and for all, one of Washington's few remaining economic security allies. Before Mr. Trump started whacking Canada with tariffs in 2025, Ottawa matched many of Washington's duties on Chinese electric vehicles, steel and aluminum. He has forced Canadians to ponder separating from America instead of working with America to separate from China.

To fight the real trade war with China, Canadian consumers must continue to choose North American products, even though the Chinese versions are less expensive. Washington needs Canadians to accept today's costs of a manufacturing sector integrated with the United States'.

Mr. Trump, for his part, will have to moderate his "made in America" demands. He can't kill off Canadian manufacturing and hope to retain access to the Canadian consumer.

To tackle the China challenge, the West requires more manufacturing clout than even an integrated North American economy can offer. Washington needs to rally all potential allies in the collective fight against China's market dominance, and they are waiting to see whether Mr. Trump finds an offramp from his wrongheaded trade war before it is too late.

CHAD P. BOWN, *a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, is an author of "How to Win a Trade War."*

EULEX FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The greatest story Dolly Parton ever wrote

COTTOM, FROM PAGE 9

song "Down From Dover," from 1970, is an exemplar of Southern gothic storytelling — a story of young pregnant women hiding in plain sight that is as haunting in post-Roe America as it was when she wrote it. The vulnerability of "Jolene" made it impossible for any cover to transcend the original.

But it wasn't until I was in my 30s that one of Dolly's stories perfectly matched my own. I had a devastating pregnancy loss, which was, I knew, my last chance to have a baby. One day, I turned on college radio to drown out the silence. Dolly's 1968 song "The Bridge" was playing. It wasn't the first time I heard it. It was the first time I understood the young girl in it, pregnant, abandoned, contemplating suicide to end the pain. The juxtaposition of that pain and Dolly's high, lonesome voice broke me wide open. I cried for the first time for everything I would not have. When I was done crying, I was the person I would be after loss.

For all her sparkle, Dolly was a simple girl. She wrote simple lyrics, simple melodies, told simple stories about simple human experiences. Her lyrics were simple because the living in Appalachia can be so hard. They were often radical for the same reason. Lines like "They just use your mind, and they never give you credit. / It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it," from her smash hit "9 to 5" are true to the working-class politics of folk music but tell a story through women instead of men. Critics have always struggled to appreciate that kind of poetry. They make exceptions for Bob Dylan or Bruce Springsteen. Brevity is wit when men do it. When women do it, we're supposed to think of it as luck. But for Dolly, it wasn't luck; it was simply the truest expression of the homeland she never, not once, not even after she became a millionaire, spurned.

She knew what I know: Appalachia's food, its literature and its music are universal. That's why anywhere in the world where people have been pushed from their homeland or trapped in its cycle of exploitation, you will find a Dolly Parton fan.

I think I knew that the first time I stood too close to the television, at 9 years old, transfixed by the big-haired blonde singing "Two Doors Down." The song wasn't about me, wasn't about my life, about my people. But good writing doesn't have to imagine everyone. It only has to imagine the truest thing about all of us, that exists in each of us.

That is what made the girl from the holler make sense to me even though the world (and my mother) thought she shouldn't. Before Dolly was a saint, when she was still just a popular twangy pop star in a wig, I saw something in the way she took up space that called to me, an ambitious girl the world did not expect much from but who knew — just knew — that she was a writer.

Dolly owned her right to write our American story. That was bigger than the hair and the boobs, shinier than the sequins, more feminist than a thousand burning bras, more honest than almost anyone gets to be in public life without selling a pound of flesh.

LANDON EDWARDS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Flowers on Dolly Parton's plaque outside the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville on Wednesday.

Dolly's songs will live on. They document American history through the eyes of Americans who don't often get to tell their own story. She also left a legacy for little ambitious girls. All races. All walks of life. The way she lived and worked, the way she sparkled and demurred, the way she took up space and took the hits for being larger than life is proof that a good story can change the way we see the world.

Dolly Parton was a writer. In the end, Dolly Parton is the greatest story that Dolly ever wrote.

Trump's imperiled Saudi nuclear deal

HENNIGAN, FROM PAGE 1

deal more dangerous.

In 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia said his nation would "without a doubt" pursue a nuclear weapon if Iran does. Ernest Moniz, a physicist who oversaw the U.S. nuclear complex as energy secretary in the Obama administration, said that Iran's estimated 970-pound stockpile of uranium enriched to 60 percent purity, most of which is now believed to be buried under rubble inside a tunnel complex in Isfahan, already provides Riyadh with the incentive to push ahead.

"The half ton of enriched uranium is directly usable in a bunch of nuclear bombs," Mr. Moniz said. "While true that it is not quite weapons-grade, it's a fallacy to think that you need weapons-grade material to make a bomb. In fact, the Hiroshima bomb did not have weapons-grade uranium, nor was it tested."

Even if Congress does not stop this agreement, it's still not guaranteed to move ahead. A day after announcing the accord, Mr. Trump conditioned its terms on Saudi Arabia normalizing relations with Israel, a move the kingdom has refused to make until Israel agrees to the creation of a Palestinian state. Even if a diplomatic solution is found to that thorny issue, the agreement is subject to a two-year technical study on the development of a manufacturing plan for the reactors, fuel and other nuclear-related materials. All this would take time, of course, and would not come to fruition until the end of Mr. Trump's term.

For now, Saudi Arabia is far from becoming a nuclear state. The kingdom says it has no intention to build a nuclear weapon, and even if the deal went into force tomorrow and the other hurdles were cleared, it would take several years to develop the capacity for the infrastructure, establish the technical knowhow and manufacture the fuel for one.

That's not to say that Saudi Arabia does not have a right to nuclear power. But Mr. Trump is not publicly insisting on its acceptance of the so-called gold standard, involving International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Under a core tenet of those terms, which more than 140 other countries abide by, the agency's inspectors have access to verify that nuclear energy facilities are not secretly used to produce weapons-grade material. Sidestepping this essential element of nonproliferation agreements sets a dangerous precedent not only for the United States but also for Russia and China, which could be emboldened to reach similar agreements in the future.

"Other nuclear technology exporters will be incentivized to cut deals with their friends as well, abandoning strict I.A.E.A. safeguard inspections in favor of vague promises not to cheat," said Scott Sagan, a professor and nuclear expert at Stanford University. "President Reagan used to say that when making arms control agreements with the Russians we should always 'trust but verify.' With the Saudis, President Trump seems to be placing too much faith in 'trust' and not enough in 'verify.'"

Saudi Arabia has long sought to control the nuclear fuel cycle from start to finish, a process that involves enriching uranium for nuclear reactors at the front end, then reprocessing fuel rods after they're spent to extract unused uranium and plutonium. The risk is that if the United States grants this wish, the kingdom would have centrifuges that can, theoretically, enrich uranium up to weapons grade. Reprocessing plants used for waste disposal can separate reactor-produced plutonium, which can also be used in nuclear bombs.

Should Saudi Arabia get the green light on enrichment or reprocessing, it will likely prompt neighboring countries to demand the same terms and provoke renegotiation requests with nations like the United Arab Emirates and South Korea on existing nuclear agreements. It loosens the proliferation safety net that's been tightly wound for decades. "It's really concerning," said Scott Roecker, a vice president at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit group dedicated to reducing the spread of nuclear weapons. "Without strong nonproliferation requirements, it will set a new starting point for negotiations with nations seeking nuclear energy."

President Trump doesn't have a good track record of negotiating nuclear deals.

The new precedent will be set as Mr. Trump is aggressively pushing nuclear technology exports in a broader attempt to revitalize the American nuclear industry. In May 2025, he signed an executive order instructing the State Department to pursue at least 20 new 123 Agreements around the globe.

The deal under consideration today says U.S. companies will have a central role selling nuclear reactors to the Saudis over a 30-year period, a potential windfall worth billions of dollars for the industry. It has the added benefit of stiff-arming Russia, China or another foreign supplier from forging deals with Riyadh that would be outside of Washington's control. Saudi Arabia could import uranium from the United States, but a two-year study will decide whether it makes economic sense to produce their own nuclear material or purchase it.

Mr. Trump doesn't have a good track record of negotiating nuclear deals. He abandoned the Obama-era Joint Plan of Action with Iran in 2018, which he still has not replaced. His 2018 détente with North Korea fell apart a year later with no meaningful resolution. In February, he allowed the last major nuclear arms control pact between the United States and Russia to expire despite Moscow's stated willingness to collaborate on an extension.

Congress must try to avoid another blow to the era of nonproliferation that's contained the global number of nuclear powers to just nine. It's a staggering accomplishment; in 1963, President John F. Kennedy said he could envision "a world in which 15 or 20 or 25 nations" have nuclear weapons within a decade.

The agreement with Saudi Arabia should not reopen the possibility of that prediction becoming true in the 21st century.

W.J. HENNIGAN *writes about national security for Opinion.*

This Times Opinion essay is funded through philanthropic support from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation (formerly the Carnegie Corporation of New York), the Outrider Foundation and the Prospect Hill Foundation. Funders have no control over the selection or focus of articles or the editing process and do not review articles before publication. The Times retains full editorial control.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ALEKSEY KONDRATYEV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

That A.I. debt binge

WIGGLESWORTH, FROM PAGE 9

Meta's balance sheet — even though it is in practice on the hook for making these future lease payments.

Goldman Sachs analysts recently tallied $1.5 trillion in aggregate lease commitments by the A.I. hyperscalers. Of this, about $1 trillion is associated with leases that haven't even started yet, which means that even the individual lease payments barely appear in public disclosures even if the debt they are associated with will result in often unavoidable costs in the future. As Goldman blandly noted: "This treatment can understate leverage and future liquidity needs as these obligations are eventually recognized and contractual payments come due." Then there is another estimated $1.5 trillion of "purchase commitments" — promises to buy chips and electricity. Those promises don't appear on balance sheets either.

Adding to the dangers, the A.I. ecosystem has become remarkably incestuous, with a wildly complicated tangle of business, investment and lending relationships tying most of the companies together. Even idiosyncratic problems in one corner could easily ripple across the whole industry.

Already there are a few hints that bond market investors — who are far more adept at sniffing out potential trouble than the more blithe equity investors — are getting antsy. Investors are starting to buy insurance to protect them if the hyperscalers go bankrupt. Based on the current cost of this insurance, investors still think these A.I. companies are good for the money, but the mere existence of such insurance for the likes of Alphabet or Microsoft would have been virtually unthinkable just two years ago.

At the peak of the 1870s railway mania, one American financier is said to have quipped that "no railroad has ever been placed on a paying basis until it has been through a receivership." Perhaps the same will be said for the A.I. data centers now being constructed around the world.

That might leave us with cheap and abundant computing power — even many bankrupt railways proved a long-term boon — but in the short term, Americans would be left dealing with a painful economic setback. The crash that followed an epic railway bond bust of 1873 was long known as the Great Depression — until that label was usurped in the 1930s. Today, it is commonly called the "Long Depression," and is a testament to the dangers of even well-founded technology booms that come to rely too much on debt. And railroad tracks last much longer than chips.

ROBIN WIGGLESWORTH *is the editor of the Financial Times' finance blog Alphaville. His forthcoming book is "A Fabulous Debt: The Epic Story of How Bonds Built the Modern World".*

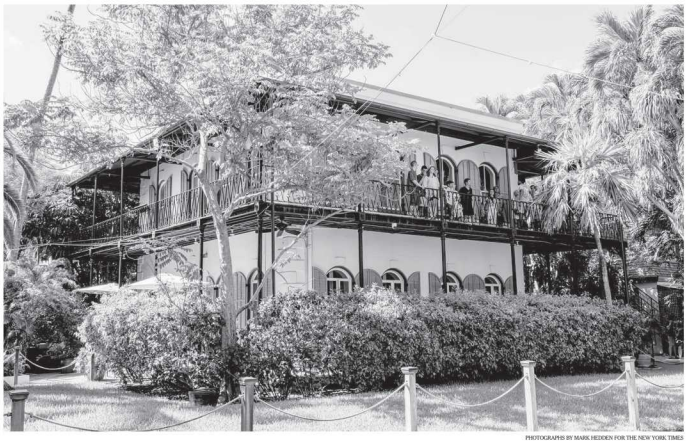
ACPM **Printed in** Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher ©2026 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Commission Paritaire No. 0528 C83099.
To submit an opinion article, email: opinion@nytimes.com. **Subscriptions:** Subscribe.INYT.com, nytsubus@nytimes.com, Tel. +33 1 41 43 93 61. **Advertising:** advertising.nytimes.com, internationaladinquiries@nytimes.com.
Regional Offices: U.K. 1 Bartholomew Close, 3rd Floor, London, EC1A 7BL; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

INTERNATIONAL HOMES

Key West intends to remain a writers' hub

As Florida island's housing costs increase, locals strive to preserve its literary legacy

BY DORIE CHEVLEN



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK HEDDEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In 1935, the poet Wallace Stevens wrote to his friend Harriet Monroe, the editor of Poetry magazine, exasperated: "Key West, unfortunately, is becoming rather literary and artistic."

Ernest Hemingway had moved into a sprawling home on Whitehead Street in Key West, Fla., a few years earlier, and he was followed by Robert Frost and the novelist John Dos Passos. Over the next few years, Tennessee Williams and the poet and short-story writer Elizabeth Bishop would buy properties on the Florida island, cementing for Stevens that Key West was "furiously literary." He left in 1940 never to return.

Where Stevens had wished the "literary and artistic" would bug off, today's Key West residents are hoping for the opposite. City officials along with writers, including Judy Blume and Meg Cabot, are leading efforts to draw writers to the island and are pouring money into preserving the legacy of its writerly past.

Driving up housing costs is the city's statistically high percentage of nonpermanent residents.

Some people lovingly refer to Key West as "a drinking town with a writing problem." But for years now, the writers have faced difficult circumstances. Within a few months in 2011, three bookstores on the island shut down. In 2024, the literary community faced another setback, when Gov. Ron DeSantis eliminated all $32 million of arts funding for Florida, forcing arts organizations to lean more heavily on private donations.

And there's the feeling among many that, unlike in Stevens's time, Key West is no longer a place where writers can afford to buy property. Adjusted for inflation, Bishop's house cost her roughly $47,000 in 1938; by contrast, the median price for a single-family house on the island today is $1.8 million.

Ms. Cabot bought her house over 20 years ago, after publishing the first five installments of her "Princess Diaries" series. "It was pretty ridiculous then," she said. "Now it's *ridiculous*."

Unlike in the past, "unfortunately, you have to be a successful writer to buy," said Lynn Kaufelt, a local real estate agent and the author of "Key West Writers and Their Houses." "You can't be a struggling writer like we were when we first came."

Driving up housing costs is the city's statistically high percentage of nonpermanent residents. Tourism is the largest share of the island's industry with over 30 percent of Key West residents working in hospitality, and roughly 15 percent of housing units are categorized as seasonal homes or vacation rentals, according to Census Bureau Data. That percentage is higher now than in the past, though it's not a new phenomenon: Most of the 20th-century writers mentioned above (Frost, Dos Passos, Stevens) were seasonal residents, as were Truman Capote, Shel Silverstein and Ralph Ellison.

Confronted with steadily rising real estate costs, local nonprofits are working to keep parts of the island carved out for artists. In 2018, the nonprofit Studios at Key West bought and renovated an 1880s-era inn to be used for its residency program, the Peyton Evans Artist Residency. Now called the PEAR House, the space can accommodate four artists and writers at a time. "Florida's not necessarily known for planning," said Jed Dodds, the executive director of the nonprofit. "So we want to make sure that Key West doesn't wake up one morning and have paved over that part of its soul."

Each resident spends just one month in the PEAR House, but many of them return, sometimes on book tour, sometimes to stage a play. "Not that it's easy anywhere to make a living as an artist, but it's particularly hard here," Mr. Dodds said. "It's our job to support them however we can."

The Studios at Key West is also now helping fill the void left by the 2011 bookstore closures. In 2016, Judy Blume and her husband, George Cooper, founded Books & Books @ The Studios of Key West. Because the store is run as a nonprofit, it is able to avoid steep commercial rent.

Since opening, Books & Books has become a tourist attraction in its own right, with Ms. Blume, who often works in the store, as its unofficial mascot. That comes with some pressure. "I don't want to disappoint people," Ms. Blume said, referring to those who might visit while she's not there. As a consolation, a cardboard cutout of Ms. Blume, one arm raised to re-stack a shelf, gets moved around the store, sometimes with a sign promoting banned books.

As nonprofits work to ensure Key West's literary future, they are also preserving its past. The wood-frame "eyebrow house" Bishop bought in 1938, with a low roof that hangs over the second-floor windows, was purchased in 2019 by the Key West Literary Seminar, another nonprofit, for $1.2 million. To the delight of many in the literary community, it finally reopened a year ago, after renovations that used Bishop's own letters to guide its historical accuracy.

Under the leadership of Arlo Haskell, the nonprofit's executive director, the house hosts high school students each summer for a writing program. For Mr. Haskell, it was paramount that the house be not just a shrine to the past, but also an incubator for future talent. The programming is designed to "make sure that the literary tradition in Key West is something that's active and vital and ongoing today," he said. "So it's not just something that's part of the history books."

In addition to the fishing expeditions and bachelorette parties many flock to the island for, the Hemingway Home and Museum is another popular Key West attraction. Privately owned, it is sustained entirely by ticket revenue, gift shop sales and wedding venue rentals, according to a museum representative.

Above, the Hemingway Home and Museum is the best-known literary destination in Key West, Fla. Above right, from top: Hemingway's writing studio; and a bathroom with his second wife's design choices. Below from left: an inn that houses artists for the Peyton Evans Artist Residency; and the renovated Elizabeth Bishop House.

To further celebrate the writer's legacy on the island, visitors can also attend the annual Hemingway Days festival, which includes a look-alike contest at one of the writer's old haunts, Sloppy Joe's Bar. Other literary tourism activities include a walking tour through Old Town, hosted by the Literary Seminar, that ends at the hypnotically blue seaport, formerly known as the Key West Bight, which inspired "The Bight," a poem by Bishop.

Ultimately, Key West's beauty — the charming architecture, the blue waters, the flitting song of white-crowned pigeons — is both its appeal and its threat to writers. While writing earlier books in her windowed office, Ms. Blume said, "sometimes I had to face the wall because it's so beautiful outside." Those qualities are also what make it so attractive to docking cruise ships, daiquiri-seeking partygoers and millionaires sniffing out second homes.

But the city has always faced some version of these challenges, Mr. Dodds said, and he hopes his nonprofit can accomplish what Key West has so far managed as people enter its shores: that "the island changes them more than they change it."

On a recent summer afternoon, a group of high school students sat in the garden behind Bishop's house, discussing sensory descriptions. For one exercise, they ate fruit grown on the property, trying to put taste into words. When Bishop lived here, these thick-leaved mango trees and coconut palms weren't even saplings; some sprouted up naturally over the years, landscapers planted others. On this day, the trees drooped heavy with fruit, their wide limbs shading the writers below.

WHAT YOU GET | ROXANA POPESCU

Homes in Ontario for $1.15 million

SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY CANADA

Georgian Bay

$1.15 MILLION (1.6 MILLION CANADIAN DOLLARS)

A classic, boat-in pine cabin with a dock and a tiki bar

This three-bedroom residence combines classic log-cabin elements with tropical touches, including a tiki bar. The home's southeast exposure maximizes sunlight through its many windows.

The house, sold turnkey, sits on the shore of Go Home Lake, near Georgian Bay, the northeastern branch of Lake Huron. A marina three miles away by boat has fuel, a mechanic, a general store, a water taxi and winter boat storage. More amenities can be found in the towns of Bala and MacTier, both about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the marina. Toronto and its international airport are approximately 100 miles south of it.

SIZE: 2,642 square feet (245 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT: $435

INDOORS: The home's soaring ceiling spans both floors. Near a ledge-rock fireplace is the living and dining area, with chesterfield leather sofas, an armchair and a dining table for 10. The kitchen has a stone backsplash, a movable island and granite counters. The primary suite opens onto the deck. This bathroom features a shower and a Jacuzzi.

Corner stairs ascend to the lofted family room and two bedrooms sharing a bathroom.

OUTDOOR SPACE: A waterfront deck off the living room has space for dining and grilling. The property, reachable only by boat and with around 560 feet (171 meters) of shoreline access, has a dock with a seating area, a hammock and the tiki bar.

COSTS: Annual property taxes for this cabin are about $4,940 (6,855 Canadian dollars).

CONTACT: Bryan Coxworth | Sotheby's International Realty Canada

TAYLOR NULLMEYER/NAVIGATOR VISUAL

Lake of Bays

$1.15 MILLION (1.6 MILLION CANADIAN DOLLARS)

A lakefront home with a guesthouse

This private two-bedroom cottage, sold furnished, was built in 1970 and recently renovated. The property also features a tiny house and more than 400 feet (122 meters) of shoreline.

The house is on a peninsula on Muskoka's Echo Lake, one of Ontario's many freshwater lakes. The area attracts hikers, cyclists and ice skaters. Huntsville, about 30 minutes by car, has hotels, a hospital, supermarkets and ski slopes. Bracebridge, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southwest, has a hospital and the South Muskoka Curling and Golf Club. Toronto and its airport are about 130 miles southwest.

SIZE: 1,171 square feet (109 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT: $982

INDOORS: The main cabin has an open-concept living room, sitting room and eat-in kitchen, with a fireplace as the focal point. The living room, with gray sofas, recessed lights and a projection screen, has views of the lake from large windows. Steps descend to an office area and a sitting room facing the fireplace. The kitchen, with wood counters and a breakfast counter, opens onto the deck. A bathroom off the kitchen has a shower, a wooden vanity and stacked washer and dryer.

Upstairs, the primary suite has a half-bathroom, a deck overlooking the lake and a soaking tub. The guest bedroom has a white-paneled ceiling with exposed beams.

The four-season, 234-square-foot guesthouse has a small kitchen, a bathroom and a lofted bedroom.

OUTDOOR SPACE: The lot has a dock. Several decks and terraces are set up for dining, entertaining and relaxing.

COSTS: The home's annual property tax is $1,351.76 (1,875 Canadian dollars).

CONTACT: Maryrose Coleman | Sotheby's International Realty Canada

ROYAL LEPAGE REAL ESTATE SERVICES

Oakville

$1.15 MILLION (1.6 MILLION CANADIAN DOLLARS)

An upscale suburban townhouse steps from Lake Ontario

This bright, three-bedroom townhouse is part of the Harbour Estates development, which has access to a lakefront walking trail.

Harbour Estates sits near Lake Ontario's western tip, in the Bronte neighborhood, a former fishing village that is now part of Oakville. Near the home are parks, restaurants, a Y.M.C.A., a golf club, a pottery studio and public and private schools. Downtown Toronto and the city's airport are about 30 miles (48 kilometers) away.

SIZE: 1,995 square feet (185 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT: $576

INDOORS: The living and dining room, on the main and second floor, has wide-plank flooring and crisp white paint. The living area features an in-wall stone fireplace and recessed lights. The kitchen has quartz counters and a breakfast nook that opens onto a deck. On the third floor, three bedrooms are connected by a hallway.

OUTDOOR SPACE: The property includes a deck off the kitchen's breakfast nook, a balcony off the front door and a partly shaded wooden terrace on the first floor. The home has an attached garage and a driveway.

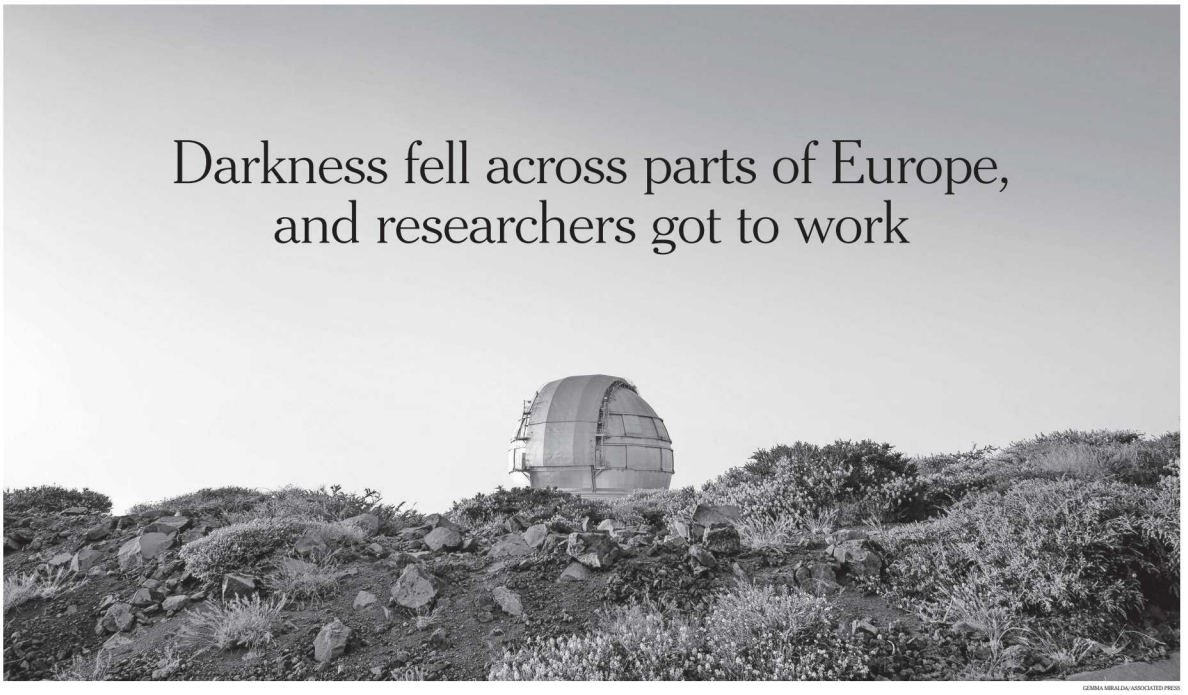
COSTS: Annual property taxes for this home are about $3,780 (5,250.42 Canadian dollars), and the monthly condominium fee is about $547 (760 Canadian dollars). Because the property is within the Greater Toronto Area, it falls under a ban that restricts foreign ownership of residential properties that is set to expire next year.

CONTACT: Connie Reda | Royal LePage Real Estate Services

Given the fast pace of the current market, some properties may no longer be available at the time of publication.

SCIENCE LAB

Darkness fell across parts of Europe, and researchers got to work



GEMMA MIRALDA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

ECLIPSE ENERGY

As the eclipse darkened the sky over Greenland, Iceland and Spain this month, millions gathered to see the spectacle unfold. Scientists looked especially intently, hoping to learn more about the sun and its unique relationship with our planet.

Before the eclipse began, scientists were making predictions about the shape that the sun's outer atmosphere, the corona, would take. The sun's magnetic field, which determines this shape, is also the force that drives solar wind, solar flares and coronal mass ejections, all of which send material from the sun out into the solar system.

Matching predictions about the sun's corona to direct observations during an eclipse can help scientists check their understanding of the sun's magnetic field and refine their forecasts of the space weather it can cause.

NASA used jets equipped with special cameras to capture views of the corona.

They also sent weather balloons into the path of totality — the area in which the moon completely blocks the sun — to understand how the eclipse's sudden darkness affects our atmosphere.

"The sun impacts our daily life, satellites and astronauts in space, and we can take advantage of this moment to advance our understanding of that influence," Kelly Korreck, the eclipse program manager at NASA Headquarters in Washington, said in a statement.

Teams in Iceland released dozens of the agency's weather balloons before, during and after the eclipse to create a timeline of its effects on the size of Earth's "boundary layer," the lowest part of the atmosphere. Three teams in Spain also released balloons equipped with 360-degree cameras and sensors to see how darkness affects ozone production.

Citizen scientists also had the chance to get involved with eclipse work, submitting videos to researchers of phenomena like daytime light pollution — excess artificial light outdoors — and eclipse shadow bands, the rippling patterns of shadow that move across the ground just before and after totality. *K. R. CALLAWAY*

GEOGRAPHE MARINE RESEARCH, VIA STORYFUL

WATERBORNE GRIEF

Grieving dolphin refuses to part with her dead calf, and her pod mourns with her

The video is haunting: A dolphin carries the dead body of her 2-week-old calf amid a pod of dolphins south of Perth, Australia.

The footage was posted last month by Geographe Marine Research, a whale conservation organization. The group is familiar with the mother, whom it has named Fraggle, and her struggles. She had already lost three other calves, and giving birth to a fourth during winter in the Southern Hemisphere posed an immediate challenge to the calf's survival.

"We still had hope she had a chance to be a mum again," the group wrote in a widely shared social media post. The group proposed that Fraggle's calf had died of pneumonia.

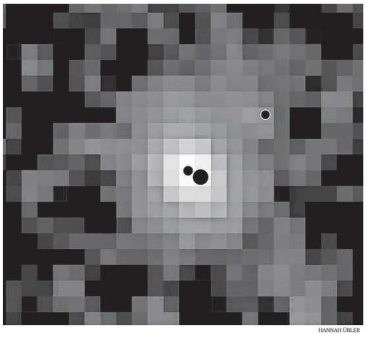
Different types of dolphins are known to carry their dead offspring for days, or even weeks, said Lori Marino, a neuroscientist and founder of the Whale Sanctuary Project. "It's absolutely clear that this is a mother grieving for her child," she said.

Dr. Marino noted that while other footage of grieving dolphins had been captured, what was notable in this video was the placement of the surrounding dolphins. "It's not just her with her dead calf," she said. "There's a recognition on the part of the whole pod that there is something going on here."

Groups of cetaceans — a term for a marine mammal that includes dolphins and whales — are known for their emotional bonds with one another and for their expressions of grief.

In 2018, an orca named Tahlequah was seen carrying her dead calf near British Columbia for more than two weeks over a thousand miles (1,600 kilometers).

"What is most remarkable in these cases is that the mothers don't have hands and live in an aquatic medium where they have to regularly surface to breathe as well as hunt," Susana Monsó, a philosopher and author, wrote in an email. "This makes holding on to the corpse something very difficult and shows a strong motivation on the part of the mother." *SOPAN DEB*



HANNAH ÜBLER

BLACK HOLE MERGER

In 700 million years or so, this cosmic trio will be a duo

When a group of astronomers set out two years ago to map parts of the ancient cosmos, they hoped to find galaxies that contained two black holes. The universe did them one better: They found a galaxy with three.

It's the first time scientists have found evidence of a young galaxy that hosts three active supermassive black holes, according to a paper published this month in the journal Astronomy & Astrophysics. Two of them are so close together that they appear to be on the verge of merging.

Virtually all the massive galaxies astronomers have studied have black holes at their centers, said Hannah Übler of the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany and the lead author. Some pairs and triplets have been observed in nearby galaxies, but never a triplet so far from Earth. Their distance, which is more than 12.5 billion light-years away, dates them to within one billion years of the Big Bang.

The snapshot of two black holes before they combine suggests that black holes have been growing, consuming stars and gases and shaping galaxies since the universe began. That merger may happen in 700 million years or so. Such a discovery wasn't possible until about four years ago, when the James Webb Space Telescope began capturing images of cosmic light that has been traveling from the outer reaches of the universe for over 13 billion years. *AMANDA SCHUPAK*

"I've been spraying paraquat since I was 10, and I don't have Parkinson's."

Chris Goodman, a farmer in Tift County, Ga., who uses paraquat to kill pigweed, on growing concerns over the potential harmful health effects of the chemical.

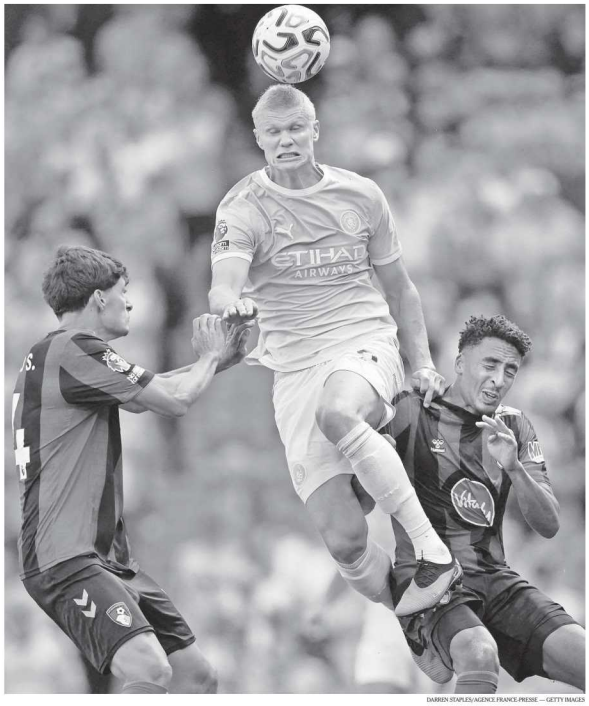
tradingref.com

Sports

Haaland's haircut should be no cause for concern

The striker's blond locks are gone, but does that mean he'll lose his power?

BY AMELIE CLAYDON
THE ATHLETIC


DARREN STAPLES/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

RONALD CORTES/GETTY IMAGES

DANIEL GARCIA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from left: Manchester City striker Erling Haaland in action against Bournemouth; the San Antonio Spurs' Victor Wembanyama after shaving his head in January; and Brazilian forward Ronaldo with his distinctive haircut at the 2002 World Cup.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic warned Erling Haaland during the World Cup that his hair was the source of his strength.

Last weekend, Haaland failed to score in the first game he played without the long blond hair that had become his trademark. The 26-year-old striker went for a buzz-cut before Manchester City opened its Premier League season against Bournemouth, then went goalless despite having five shots in a 2-1 win. Before last Sunday, he had scored in every Premier League opener he had played (seven goals in four games).

Ibrahimovic's warning referred to Samson, the biblical figure who lost his strength when Delilah cut his hair. But from the former Brazil striker Ronaldo to Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz and Tadej Pogacar, the biggest names in sports have produced very different results after reaching for the clippers.

Premier League titles, Grand Slams, Tour de France victories and a World Cup have all followed dramatic haircuts. So have losing seasons, early exits and sharp drops in form.

Haaland had considered cutting his hair after the World Cup, where he scored seven goals as Norway reached the quarterfinals in its first appearance at the competition in 28 years. In the video documenting the haircut, he described the new season as a "fresh start" but admitted Ibrahimovic's warning had left him nervous.

Ronaldo was 25 when he began sporting what may have been soccer's most famous haircut at the 2002 World Cup. He had spent much of the previous two and a half years battling serious knee injuries, including a ruptured patellar tendon that created doubts over whether he would play at the highest level again, and had returned to the Brazil team only shortly before the tournament.

Carrying a thigh injury before Brazil's semifinal against Turkey and tired of questions about his fitness, Ronaldo shaved almost his entire head, leaving a patch above his forehead to distract journalists. He later told ESPN Brazil that speculation about his injury had been duly replaced by questions about his hair.

The distraction did little harm to his comeback: Ronaldo scored the only goal against Turkey and both goals in Brazil's 2-0 final victory over Germany, finishing the tournament with eight goals, the Golden Boot and a second World Cup winner's medal.

Other soccer players found changing their hairstyles similarly painless. David Beckham, then 24, arrived for Manchester United's game at Leicester City in March 2000 with his blond hair replaced by a close crop. He scored a free kick in a 2-0 victory.

Cristiano Ronaldo, then 32, provided another short-term argument against Samson when he scored twice and assisted another for Portugal in his first appearance after shaving his hair following Real Madrid's 2017 Champions League triumph, before winning a fifth Ballon d'Or later that year.

Before the 2002 N.B.A. playoffs, a 23-year-old Kobe Bryant cut off the Afro he had worn for more than five years, claiming he felt "a lot quicker." He scored 34 points for the Los Angeles Lakers against the Portland Trail Blazers in his first game with the new look. The Lakers eventually completed a third consecutive N.B.A. championship, with Bryant averaging 26.8 points, 5.8 rebounds and 5.3 assists across their four-game finals sweep of New Jersey.

Victor Wembanyama was looking for something rather more literal in January this year. After San Antonio followed a 1-point defeat in Minnesota by losing heavily to Oklahoma City, the 22-year-old Wembanyama and his teammate Keldon Johnson shaved each other's heads. Wembanyama returned with 22 points and 10 rebounds as the Spurs beat Milwaukee, 119-101.

Michael Jordan provides the most famous long-term case. With his hairline receding, Jordan shaved his head clean in 1989 and turned the look into one of the most recognizable images in sport. He led the N.B.A. with 33.6 points per game the following season. A year later, Jordan won the league's Most Valuable Player Award and scoring title, and the Chicago Bulls won their first N.B.A. championship. Five more championships followed.

In 1995, a 24-year-old Andre Agassi arrived at the Australian Open with his head shaved, having spent the early part of his career with long hair that became central to his public image. He later revealed that he had worn a hairpiece because of his receding hairline but had become so anxious about it coming loose that it distracted him during matches. Once rid of the hairpiece, Agassi produced the most successful season of his career.

Djokovic's post-haircut performance was even more extreme. The 23-year-old and his Serbia teammates won the Davis Cup for the first time in December 2010 and fulfilled a promise by shaving their heads in celebration. Djokovic then began 2011 by winning his first 41 matches. He finished the year 70-6, with three Grand Slams and five Masters 1000 titles, and ascended to the world No. 1 ranking for the first time.

Alcaraz was 22 when his brother made a mistake with the clippers before the 2025 U.S. Open, leaving him with little choice but to shave most of his hair off. Alcaraz joked that he was "faster" without it and reached the final without dropping a set before beating Jannik Sinner in four sets to win his sixth Grand Slam and take the world No. 1 ranking.

The same theory reached the peloton this year when Pogacar first experimented with a closely shaved, bleached look before Strade Bianche in Tuscany in March. He won that race for a record fourth time.

The blond hair returned in a similarly short style for the Tour de France, where Pogacar joked that the cut made him "more aero." The 27-year-old then won five stages and a fifth yellow jersey to draw level with Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain for most overall Tour victories.

The Mini Crossword

8/29/2026 BY JOEL FAGLIANO

ACROSS

1 "___ oh, ___!"
4 Wordle and Scrabble, for two
6 "Heading over now!"
8 Totally awesome
9 So-called "frankenfood," for short
10 The University of Michigan has the largest one in the U.S., seating over 107,000 people
12 Go "Zzzz"
13 "Don't worry, ___ pass"

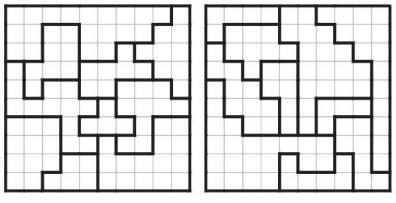
DOWN

1 First Muslim mayor of N.Y.C.
2 Coney Barrett of the Supreme Court
3 Fox sitcom set in a Los Angeles loft
4 Tiny summer pests
5 ___ Adams, Founding Father for whom a beer is named
6 Surgery sites, for short
7 ___ Kippur
11 Bit of Braille

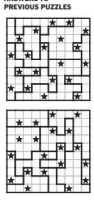
ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

	T	V	S	
D	R	O	O	L
H	O	W	T	O
L	O	T	T	O
	P	O	O	P

Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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Wit Twister

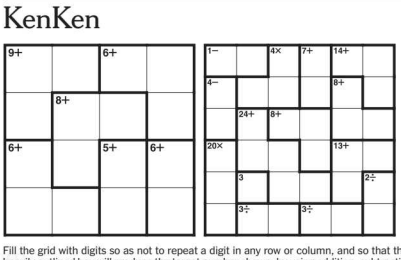
Salons in all our ocean _____ are cowed by Pirate Pete,
Whose wiry beard can dull the keenest blade you've ever seen.
He loves to _____ with barbers, son, but don't admit defeat.
Just _____ your razor till it's sharper than a guillotine!

Complete the verse with words that are anagrams of each other. Each underline represents a letter.

PUZZLE BY STUART CLELAND

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER Belarus --> rubles

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

1	4	2	3
4	3	1	2
3	2	4	1
2	1	3	4

1	3	6	4	5	2
6	5	3	2	4	1
2	1	4	3	6	5
3	6	2	5	1	4
4	2	5	1	3	6
5	4	1	6	2	3

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

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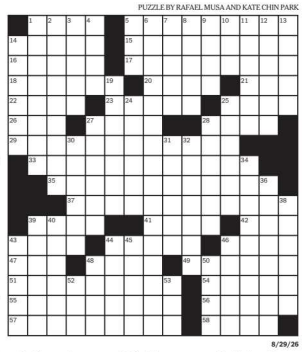
Crossword | Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY RAFAEL MUSA AND KATE CHIN PARK



8/29/26

ACROSS

1 Main characters for an early reader
5 They get rings for hoops
14 Skin-care brand known for its pore strips
15 Large restaurant vessel shaped like another vessel
16 Conference handout
17 Dubious sighting in the night sky
18 Started to boil
20 Work, as a joke
21 Romance author Huang
22 They might be rehabbed with knee flexion
23 His #33 was retired by the Knicks in 2003
25 Winner of the 2025 Outstanding Drama Series Emmy, with "The"
26 Personne canonisée: Abbr.
27 ___ Capital, investment firm co-founded by Mitt Romney
28 Hits the mark, in a way
29 Many people climb it
33 Naturally concluded
35 Ones giving a toast at an outdoor party?
37 Court session, perhaps
39 Like much of Libya
41 Depicting the world bleakly and cynically
42 Put your back into it
43 "Sweet dreams are made of cheese / Who am I to dis a ___?" (parody lyrics)
44 Is immersed
46 Fair trade, say
47 "It is not easy for a ___ to balance himself on a ladder": "Animal Farm"
48 A word in closing
49 Relative of house music
51 Inverse of an exponential function
54 Vikings' offense?
55 What a supposed bug is often revealed to be
56 Grant
57 Deftly evades
58 Come off as

DOWN

1 Nonhuman provider of medical advice
2 Neck topper
3 Shoves (in)
4 Sonic system
5 Org. featured in 1998's "Enemy of the State"
6 Breaking character?
7 Like parts of Istanbul
8 Romanization of the common Chinese surname 程
9 ___ legs
10 Stability aids, informally
11 Soft, silky material
12 Depicts stylishly
13 Green day star, for short
14 Humongous, slangily
19 Stocked and sold, as goods
24 August ___, "Fences" playwright
25 Makes sense of
27 Deliberately exasperated
28 More sassy
30 Indecisive way to end
31 Gets by
32 Binary, in a way
34 Former
36 "Wow ... what are the chances?!"
38 Publisher of the front-page headline "This sport is stupid anyway" after a U.S. loss at the World Cup, in brief
39 Half-spoken, half-sung passages of an opera
40 Not fair
43 Nearly 90
44 It goes on top
45 Shockingly unconventional
46 Stepped-on instrument
48 "___ chic!"
50 Time divisions
52 "___ You That Somebody?" (1998 Aaliyah hit)
53 Half of a couple

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

S	C	R	E	W	I	T			H	E	L	E	N	
I	H	O	P	E	N	O	T		A	G	I	L	E	
N	O	N	A	N	S	W	E	R		R	I	N	S	E
E	R	A			T	E	L	E	P	O	R	T	E	D
W	E	L	L	W	E	L	L	W	E	L	L			
		D	E	E	P	S		O	L	D	S	A	W	
A	M	I	G	A	S		B	R	E	R		M	I	D
M	A	N	O	R		Y	A	K		A	T	A	R	I
A	S	H		E	T	O	N		S	M	I	L	E	Y
	H	O	N	S	H	U		M	C	I	N	G		
		B	O	O	S	T	E	R	S	E	A	T	S	
I	T	S	A	B	R	E	E	Z	E			M	I	I
L	O	O	F	A		E	S	C	A	P	E	A	C	T
L	I	L	A	C			S	A	M	A	N	T	H	A
S	L	I	N	K				L	O	W	G	E	A	R

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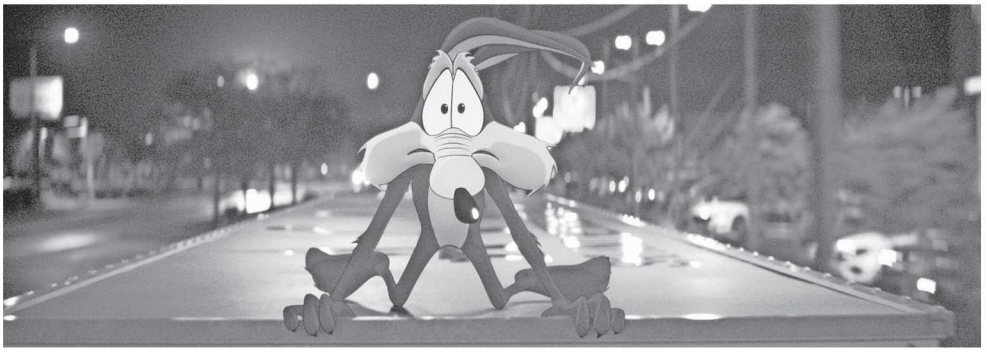
Weekend

PHOTOGRAPHS VIA KETCHUP ENTERTAINMENT

At right, John Cena, who plays a corporate lawyer in "Coyote vs. Acme," and below him, Wile E. Coyote, the plaintiff in the film, a hybrid of live action and animation.

'Coyote vs. Acme' finally catches a break



How a comedy on the brink of extinction won its theatrical release

BY JASON T. BAILEY

It all *seemed* so straightforward.

When Warner Bros. first announced the film "Coyote vs. Acme" — a hybrid of live action and animation inspired by the studio's Looney Tunes shorts — it sounded like a no-brainer. Here was a fresh take on some of Warner Bros.'s most beloved intellectual property, the kind of family-friendly nostalgia that generates big box-office returns while introducing durable characters to new audiences who then become eager consumers of the studio's library. (Warner Bros. did it before with Looney Tunes, making a mint with the 1996 film "Space Jam.")

The project came with a compelling angle already in place: It was inspired by Ian Frazier's 1990 humor piece in The New Yorker, "Coyote v. Acme," which imagined the Looney Tunes mainstay Wile E. Coyote taking the Acme Corporation to court for its many defective products that had repeatedly thwarted his pursuit of the Road Runner.

"I actually knew the article, because I had been at Warner Bros., in and around animation there for years, and that thing was kind of legend," Chris deFaria, one of the film's producers, said in an interview.

Dave Green, the film's director, landed the job by pinpointing how to translate Frazier's authentic legalese into cinematic terms, drawing comparisons to courtroom dramas like "A Few Good Men" and corporate thrillers like "The Insider."

Green's attachment was announced in December 2019, and he and deFaria set about finding the right scribe for the job. Several writers had taken passes, including James Gunn, the "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Superman" director (though he joined as the film's other producer). The team eventually landed on Samy Burch, the casting director-turned-screenwriter whose script "May December," an eventual Oscar nominee, had not yet been produced.

Will Forte was cast as Coyote's attorney, and John Cena was signed to play Acme's ruthless corporate lawyer; filming began in 2022. "It was a wonderful shoot," Green said. "The cast, the crew, everyone was so on board for this project and understood its tone, and were just excited to collaborate." Warner Bros. seemed high on the project as well; in 2020, Deadline and Variety reported that the studio had set a release date of July 21, 2023. But a representative for Warner Bros. Discovery said in a recent telephone interview that "the trades have largely misreported significant pieces of this," and insisted that when the picture was greenlit in December 2020, it was for release on HBO Max, the company's streaming service. (Both Green and deFaria said they were told it would be released theatrically.)

Whatever the case, in April 2022, the studio announced that on July 21, 2023, it would instead release Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" in theaters — igniting a movie-going phenomenon.

But as days and then weeks passed, no new date for "Coyote vs. Acme" was announced, "which got me concerned immediately," deFaria said. There was nothing concrete, however, until his phone rang on Nov. 8, 2023, while he was on the Warner lot making arrangements for a screening of the completed film a few days later for cast and crew members.

"It was just remarkably unceremonial and fast," he recalled. "It came from the two heads of the studio at the time, who simply said, 'Hey Chris, just want to let you know we're not going to be releasing "Coyote vs. Acme" in theaters, and its future is up in the air.' Period. And I said, 'I don't understand what that means.'" According to deFaria, they provided few details, or much of an explanation; when he asked what was going to happen to the film, "They said: 'We don't know. It may not get released at all.'"

The story hit the industry trade papers the next day. Industry observers noted that the film was greenlit under previous leadership, before Warner Media merged with Discovery and appointed David Zaslav as its chief executive; comparisons were also drawn to the studio's decision the previous year to indefinitely shelve its productions of "Batgirl" and "Scoob! Holiday Haunt." But those films were not yet completed, and their cancellation could save the studio additional postproduction costs. "Coyote vs. Acme" was finished and only its distribution and marketing costs remained, which could have been minimized by its being released on HBO Max. The official explanation was couched in corporate language. "With the re-launch of Warner Bros. Pictures Animation in June, the studio has shifted its global strategy to focus on theatrical releases," a spokesperson for the Warner Bros. Motion Picture Group said in a statement. "With this new direction, we have made the difficult decision not to move forward with 'Coyote vs. Acme.'"

"We never felt like there was no hope, or there was no way."

Green was given no additional details. "I had just been told that their strategy had changed, and it was basically left there," he said.

"Obviously, I felt it personally," the screenwriter Samy Burch said in an interview before echoing a concern shared by Green and deFaria. "When you think about the amount of people, the amount of craftsmen that worked on this movie, that are figuring out, 'How do we crunch this car in practical effects, so then we can animate a piano falling?' Dave had just put so much into the film, and so it was a really shocking, sad thing."

That sense of shock was felt throughout the industry, prompting outrage from filmmakers and fans over what they saw as the studio's willingness to shelve a finished film for the sake of its short-term bottom line. Four days later, Warner Bros. Discovery tried to stem the tide of bad press by announcing that it would consider selling "Coyote vs. Acme" to other distributors; Netflix, Apple, Amazon Prime Video and Paramount all reportedly expressed interest.

But no deal was made. "I don't know how sincere the effort was," deFaria said. And in February 2024, Warner Bros. Discovery took a $115 million write-down for the third quarter of 2023, part of a "strategic realignment plan associated with the Warner Bros. Pictures Animation group." Zaslav (whose pay for 2023 was reported as nearly $50 million) said that it took "real courage" to shelve films like "Coyote vs. Acme."

And that, it seemed, was that. "I had a year where I think what I had rationalized was, this is going to be at the Turner Classic Movies Festival 2058," Burch said.

But Green refused to say die. "Maybe I'm really bad at understanding the word 'no' or something," he said, "but we never felt like there was no hope, or there was no way."

As the months passed, one dim ray of hope appeared. In August 2024, the independent film production and distribution company Ketchup Entertainment announced its acquisition of "The Day the Earth Blew Up," another Looney Tunes feature abandoned by Warner. It was a less expensive picture than "Coyote vs. Acme," conceived of and executed as an HBO Max original. It proved a modest success for Ketchup when it was released in theaters in spring 2025. (In a twist, the movie is currently streaming on HBO Max.)

Just a few days after the release of "The Day the Earth Blew Up," Green turned his phone on while leaving a movie theater, "and I had a missed phone call from a studio executive," he recalled. "They told me, 'Tomorrow there's going to be a news break.'"

It was the news he'd been waiting a year and a half for: Ketchup was expected to make a $50 million offer for distribution rights to "Coyote vs. Acme." The sale to Ketchup was completed soon after. In the summer of 2025, the company scheduled the picture for an August 2026 release; when the first trailer went online in April, it racked up more than 25 million views in its first 24 hours. The marketing winked at the offscreen controversies, with its tagline, "The movie Acme doesn't want you to see," underlining the film's themes of corporate malfeasance, profit over people and the dangers of monopolies — ideas that play more forcefully now than they might have in an unobstructed release.

Was it worth all the trouble? "We always dreamed of having the audience connect with it in ways that were nostalgic for what they remembered, relevant for what they're experiencing today and warm and emotional," deFaria said. "We're checking all those boxes right now, and we probably wouldn't have checked a couple of those boxes had it not been this martyr-slash-underdog-hero story of the film itself. So where am I today? I think this is a perfect outcome. Possibly."

Green — who posted in November 2023 that "in the spirit of Wile E. Coyote, resilience and persistence win the day" — concurred. "At its foundation, this is a story about an underdog who gets crushed by a giant corporation, and rises up," he said. "That is, in a nutshell, what has happened so beautifully with the movie, which is really incredible. And it's hard to articulate truly how I feel in this moment, because it is totally surreal."

At left, a scene from the film, which endured an ordeal before its release this past week.

No one dazzled as much as Dolly

The entertainer used her clothes and her body to subvert expectations

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

Of all the aphorisms uttered by Dolly Parton, the "glittery country goddess from Tennessee," as Interview magazine called her, who died on Tuesday in Nashville, perhaps the most telling was a line she uttered as part of a David Letterman Top 10 list of pet peeves in 1995.

One of the things that most irritated her, Parton cracked, standing on a balcony in her Dollywood amusement park in a black and gold top with a keyhole neckline framing her cleavage, her hair teased into a platinum nimbus and a big grin on her face, was "Accountants who don't understand how much it costs to make me look this cheap."

JIM SMEAL/RON GALELLA COLLECTION, VIA GETTY IMAGES

In fact, no one understood what it took to look like Dolly Parton better than Dolly Parton — or thought more about what it meant and how clothes could give character to a voice.

She may have been only five feet tall (152 centimeters), but she made herself larger than life. In doing so, she challenged stereotypes of all kinds about women, appearance and substance with a wink, a healthy dose of self-aware irony and a refusal to apologize for what she wanted.

From the time she signed her first recording contract with Monument Records in 1965, she was inventing not only her sound but her public self: a cartoon bimbo in a giant platinum wig, towering heels, a push-up bra and rhinestones, whom she later christened (in song) a "Backwoods Barbie."

That signature style never wavered. At the time of her death, Parton reportedly had more than 350 wigs, more than 2,000 pairs of shoes and a 50,000-square-foot (4,600-square-meter) archive of bedazzled stage outfits. In fact, she had so many outfits she wrote an entire book about them in 2023. That book, "Behind the Seams: My Life in Rhinestones," was a sort of autobiography in clothes to go with "Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life in Lyrics," her autobiography in song. For her, they were two sides of the same story.

And she had inspired not only her fans, who attended Dolly look-alike conventions — Rhinestone Fest and Dolly Day — in full Dolly gear, but also artists such as Miley Cyrus, Kacey Musgraves and Carrie Underwood, all of whom went through their own rhinestone cowgirl phases. Not to mention Emma Grede and Khloé Kardashian of the Good American brand, who collaborated with Parton on a Joleans denim and apparel collection (a quintessentially Dolly reference).

As the lyrics went on her debut album, "This dumb blonde ain't nobody's fool."

Now that kind of singular image-making seems like a standard approach for artists of any gender, but Parton did it before the age of stylists and brand deals. And she often did it in the face of active criticism: from her shocked preacher grandfather, when she was a child; from the parents of her school friends, who thought she was "a bad influence," as she wrote in her book; and from the executives of her record label, who thought she would not be taken seriously because, she later paraphrased, they said "you look more like a hooker than you do a singer."

What they did not know is that she understood exactly what she was doing: tapping into clichés rooted deep in the cultural hive mind while confronting them at the same time. She was not just going to outwork and out-sing everyone, she was going to out-sparkle them, too, subverting the very expectations she was creating.

"Never leave a rhinestone unturned," she often quipped. Every gleam was a reminder of the dangers that came with underestimating or stereotyping based on looks. Or, as she sang, "Don't judge me by the cover, 'cause I'm a real good book."

Sure, her style inspiration may have been the town tramp, with "her tight skirts and her high-heeled shoes and her red nails and her red lipstick and her peroxided hair" (or so she wrote in her fashion book).

But she stayed married to one man her entire life. Sure, her clothes were kind of gaudy, but as "Coat of Many Colors," her song about a coat of scraps that her mother sewed for her as a child, proved, there is resonance in vibrant plumage.

She was not just going to outwork and out-sing everyone, she was going to out-sparkle them, too.

20TH CENTURY FOX FILM CORP./EVERETT COLLECTION

20TH CENTURY-FOX/GETTY IMAGES

Parton's screen appearances included, from left, the 1980 film "9 to 5," which was her first movie, and "Rhinestone," released in 1984.

RON DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES

EDWARD KEATING/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In addition to entertainment, Parton had business interests. Far left, Parton in 1993, at the grand opening of the eighth season of her theme park Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Left, Parton in 1992.

CBS, VIA GETTY IMAGES

RON GALELLA, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from left, Dolly Parton, circa 1992; Parton and Carol Burnett in the television special, "Dolly and Carol in Nashville," 1979; and Parton in 1979, when Mayor Tom Bradley proclaimed Dolly Parton Day in Los Angeles.

(So much so that the coat of many colors ended up being named one of the three most famous pieces of clothing in song by American Songwriter, along with Prince's raspberry beret and Elvis's blue suede shoes.)

Sure, her hair was, as she said on Letterman, so fake it was "a fire hazard," but it was also practical. The wigs meant, Parton said, that she could avoid the bleach and teasing that styling her actual hair would require (and that might destroy it) while also ensuring she would "never have a bad hair day."

And sure, she could "get away with less," as she told Barbara Walters in the 1982 interview. But why should she? "I like more," she said.

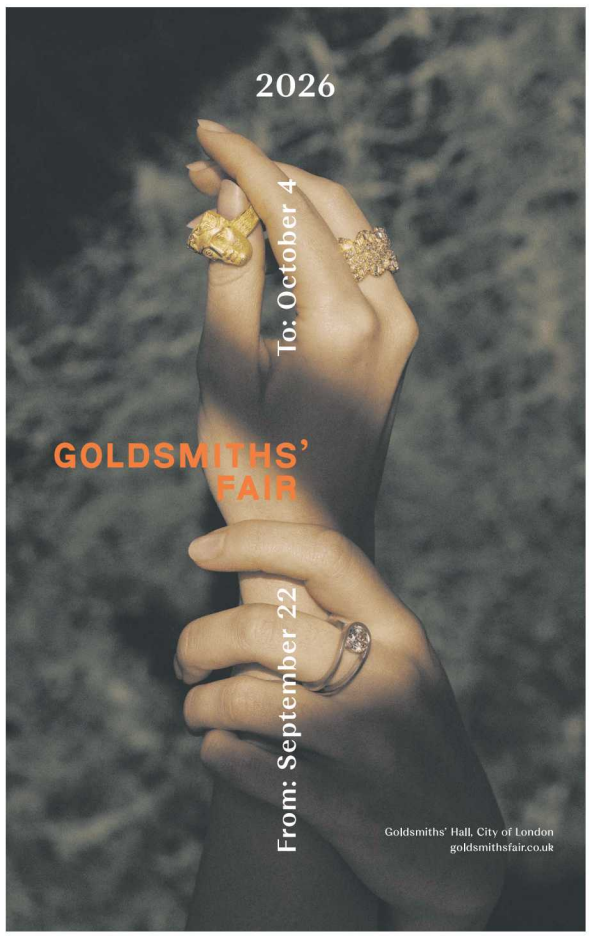
Her collaborators in that quest included Lucy Adams, who made the crystal-studded bell-bottom jumpsuits on her 1960s and '70s album covers; Bob Mackie, who did the even more bedazzled look for the 1979 "Dolly and Carol in Nashville" TV special; Tony Chase (also a favorite of Gloria Gaynor); Ann Roth, the costume designer for "9 to 5," her first movie; and the designer Steve Summers, who started working with Parton in 1991 and spent three decades as her creative director in the Dollywood atelier.

"Dolly created the image," he said in 2023. "She laid out all the ground rules. I just followed them."

Those rules, she said, always started with "really tight and really sparkly." Whether it was in her sparkles and pastels butterfly phase, her fringed rhinestone cowgirl era or her goddess in Vegas incarnation.

"I never cared what other people did, and I never cared what other people said about what I wore," Parton told Vogue when her fashion memoir was released. "It was more important that I be comfortable in my own clothes and in my own self."

The rest of the world may have been chasing grunge, minimalism, shock or brand deals, but she never strayed from the aesthetic that glimmered so brightly for her as a girl. Though she once joked, "I'm not a fashion icon; I'm an eyesore," what she was was unforgettable.



Black and blue

BOOK REVIEW

The Black Shield: An American Memoir of Family and Power
By Wilbert L. Cooper. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 402 pp. $32.*

BY ELI SASLOW

VIA WILBERT COOPER; PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL LOZADA

Wilbert Cooper and his father, Will, in the late 1990s.

Wilbert Cooper was a teenager the first time he found the weapon. His parents both worked as police officers for the city of Cleveland in the early 2000s, and Cooper was borrowing his father's unmarked car when he reached into the driver's side pocket and felt a dense piece of metal about the size of a banana. It was as heavy as a bowling ball, camouflaged for darkness and wrapped in duct tape for easy gripping.

Cooper had grown up around his parents' city-issued handguns, but the blackjack suggested a more clandestine style of violence. When he asked about it, his father took the weapon out of Cooper's hands with a smile and showed him how he might use it to crack a suspect over the head.

Instead of following three generations of his own Black family into the Cleveland Police Department, Cooper became a journalist. His reporting over the last decade for Vice and the Marshall Project, among other outlets, has helped document the failures of America's criminal justice system, including racially biased policing and excessive use of force. All of it eventually led Cooper back to the contradictions at the heart of his own childhood: "to all the questions I've been having about Mom and Dad's profession and the life it has afforded me — and the life it has denied so many others."

The result is Cooper's evocative new memoir, "The Black Shield," in which he tries to make sense of the parents who raised him and the system that made them both targets and enforcers. He embeds with the Black Shield, Cleveland's fraternal organization for Black officers, and digs through court records to reveal a Police Department that spent decades deploying Black officers in order to change its look but without changing its outcomes.

Cooper is a vivid writer and an unsparing reporter, willing to turn the same scrutiny on his relatives, even when it means exposing them as complicit. His great-uncle Lloyd patrolled the city's segregated East Side with both charisma and a penchant for violence. "By using it against his own community, he was granted the patina of freedom — money, clothes, impunity on the streets," Cooper writes.

His most elusive reporting targets are the ones closest to home: his parents, to whom the book is dedicated. His mother, Gayle, grew up in Cleveland in the 1960s with a police force that saw her as "an enemy combatant," Cooper writes. The city was about 30 percent Black, but its police force was nearly 93 percent white. When officers pulled up at Gayle's elementary school playground on patrols, she was taught to run. "Everybody would jump fences," she told her son. "We'd all break out in full sprints. You'd run and run and hide or run and get home."

By the late 1970s, after a Black Shield lawsuit forced the city to begin diversifying its police force, Gayle was the one giving chase. She was a broke mother of three stuck in an abusive relationship when the Police Department offered her a badge; she worked her way up to vice detective and became an instructor at the police academy.

By the time Cooper was in his teens, Gayle had moved their family into a big house in the suburbs where she kept hundreds of pairs of red pumps in the bedroom closet. She had come to see police officers as the caretakers of a functional society. "I wouldn't want to live in a world without them, because that world would be chaos," she said.

But what Cooper is searching for, he writes, is "some kind of redemptive grace." He hunts for evidence that his parents wrestled with their roles in an oppressive system. Instead, he eventually uncovers his father's internal police record.

Will was a cocky street cop with shoulders built by hundreds of daily push-ups who often posed for photos with a hand cupped around his crotch. When he discovered his colleagues' racist graffiti all over the police locker room, he responded with anti-white graffiti of his own. But for all his bravado and righteous anger, he couldn't transcend the patterns of a racist system. He worked for the department's Office of Professional Standards, a place Cooper describes as "the department's incinerator" — where documents, even entire case files, would go missing or disappear. And then, in 2001, he shot another Black man.

His parents armored themselves to survive a racist country and give him a safe childhood.

The incident began as a routine drug raid, until the suspect drove off and Will spotted the dealer's Ford Expedition idling at a stop sign. He and his partner were working undercover with no arrest warrant. They chose to open fire, hitting the driver's side door and the rear window. The suspect fled as Will and his partner chased him through backyards, shooting him in the back and shoulder. Only later did the officers return to the car and discover the suspect's 3-year-old son safely buckled into the back seat, amid bullet holes and broken glass.

When Cooper reads the incident report, he recognizes the same patterns he's seen while reporting on a decade of police violence: contradictory statements, hollow justifications hidden behind police jargon, familiar phrases like "I feared for my life" or "he was reaching." Ultimately, it's part of another pro forma investigation without consequences.

"I feel as though I don't know the man," Cooper writes.

His parents armored themselves to survive a racist country and provide him with a safe, comfortable childhood, but that same armor is what holds "The Black Shield" at a distance. Despite Cooper's beautiful excavation, the people at the heart of the book stay just beyond reach.

"After the contact high of the discoveries, I was overcome with a hollow, empty, feeling," Cooper writes. "I wanted to close the distance. But despite all I'd already learned about their world, the space remained."

Eli Saslow is a writer at large for The New York Times.

From the Podcast

Sophie Elmhirst

SOPHIE DAVIDSON

"A Marriage at Sea," by the journalist Sophie Elmhirst, tells a true story of shipwreck. Maurice and Maralyn Bailey took to the seas from 1970s England, selling their suburban home to buy a boat and sail to New Zealand. Nine months into the trip, a sperm whale breached under their boat and it sank, leaving them stranded on a crude raft. Elmhirst, who brings readers deep into their lives, appeared on the "Book Review" podcast last year to discuss "A Marriage at Sea," which was one of the Book Review's 10 Best Books of 2025 and came out in paperback this summer. This excerpt has been condensed and edited.

How do you describe this book to people without giving away the entire story? Tell us about it.

It's obviously, on one level, a story of a catastrophe, right? There they are, halfway around the world, and they're hit by a whale. And in terms of how not to give away the whole thing — I don't think there needs to be a secret about the fact that they survived, because it's a story of their whole lives. I was just as interested in the aftermath of what they went through as I was in the endurance of it in itself. I guess what I tend not to give away is *how* exactly they're rescued. I try to hold something back.

When did you first hear about this story?

It was a while ago. I was researching a piece about people trying to escape, especially escape the land. And I found myself trawling around on a website devoted to castaway stories and shipwreck stories. There were lots of photographs and tales of lone wild men who were pitched up on desert islands and had various escapades. And in among all of these was a tiny little black-and-white picture of a man and a woman. And she caught my eye because she was rare in this crowd.

I could tell, also, that something about them seemed oddly familiar. I don't know whether that's just me projecting in hindsight, but once I discovered they were English in the 1970s, and once I started learning more about them as characters, there was just something very identifiable about them.

You come across stories all the time, presumably. Why was this the one to focus your first book on?

I could tell the story was special. I couldn't believe I hadn't heard it before, couldn't believe it had been forgotten. It's so extreme in its drama, the sheer length of time they're drifting in the Pacific, the behaviors they have to resort to, the beheading of turtles, and eating of raw fish and eyeballs. And all of this stuff is just — it's gold. The material is incredibly rich.

But I think I knew from the start that couldn't be the whole story. It wouldn't be enough for a book just to have the extremity, just to have the drama. I knew from the beginning that I wanted it to be a story of the interior process of going through something like this, but also quite a sort of intimate examination of a marriage going through something like this.

I don't want to ruin any of the details about what their experience was like. But I was wondering if you could pick out a few that stood out.

What I found almost horrifying on an existential level was the psychological process. Maurice hits despair very early. He's plotting how to kill himself with a gas canister. And she, meanwhile, trying to keep him afloat, is wildly optimistic about their chances of survival. And he thinks she's crazy. It's this extraordinary battle of wits and attitude. She has all these incredibly imaginative tactics to keep them going. And I found some of those the most moving, and indicative of the depths they had to reach in order to keep going.

The "Book Review" podcast can be found at https://www.nytimes.com/books or through popular podcast apps.

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD

Written in the Stars

Edited by Will Shortz

Across

1 "Aladdin" villain
6 "It's yours!"
10 Sarcastic "Sure"
14 Heat setting, in brief?
17 Dutch Caribbean isle
18 Explosive sound
20 Lacking constraints
22 *MARTIN SHEEN*
24 *LIAM NEESON*
25 Chef Hussain of "The Great British Bake Off" fame
26 Discount Chinese e-tailer
28 Jumbo shrimp
29 Ben & Jerry's alternative
31 Pink-slips
33 *NORMAN REEDUS*
37 *GREG KINNEAR*
40 Conditions of equilibrium
41 Historian's division
42 Undying?
43 Offer illegally, as tickets
45 Publicly proclaim
46 Scatters messily
48 *MORGAN FREEMAN*
55 Class for some recent arrivals, for short
56 Kind of green
59 Chemist Lilly
60 Chilean poet who served as a Communist senator
61 Four to two, e.g.
64 Friar with a famous "razor"
68 Turns on the waterworks
69 Ones making periodic appearances ... or the link between the capitalized clues and their answers
73 2024's "Joker: ___ a Deux"
74 Alfresco area
75 "Everything cool between us?"
76 Poorly nourished
78 Fill at a fill-up
80 ___ card
81 Rite Aid rival
84 *CHRISTIAN SLATER*
89 City on the Illinois River
92 Grumpy grimace
93 Discontinued Swedish cars
96 Inauthentic
97 "Catch-22" topic
100 Join, as two metal surfaces
102 *ISABELLA ROSSELLINI*
104 *KEVIN KLINE*
107 Erté's style, informally
108 Canadian fuel brand
109 All-vowel musical refrain
110 Actress Falco with four Emmys
112 Sugary secretion
114 *BEA ARTHUR*
118 *MARLON BRANDO*
122 Submitted by the deadline
123 B.L.T. or P.B.J., cutesily
124 Musician/actress Haim
125 Syllable of censure
126 Instants
127 High-protein bean
128 Big name in truck rentals

Down

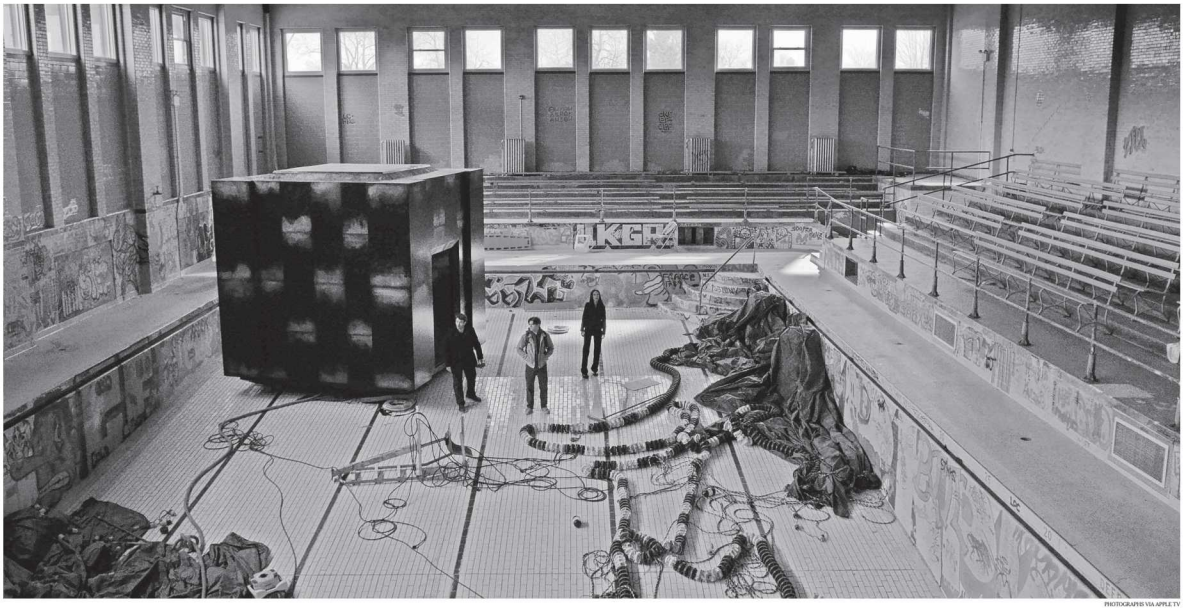
1 God, to Bob Marley
2 "___ you done?"
3 Musical comedy that was 1968's highest-grossing film
4 Caustic
5 Boolsheggar's concern
6 Like 666, popularly
7 Band that's big in Japan?
8 Disoriented
9 Administered, as a drug
10 Potentialities
11 Something found under a top
12 Wriggler in a stream
13 "____ fugit"
14 Star's opposite
15 Stout figure?
16 Supreme Egyptian god
18 Inuit watercraft
19 Office messages
21 Like some mattresses and offers
23 Mineral that makes cosmetics shimmer
27 Remove an identifier from, as on Instagram
29 Clear
30 Shoulder press targets, to trainers
32 Hit a ____
34 Where a flock may gather
35 Beginning on
36 Attach with a needle and thread
38 Unused
39 Extreme happiness
44 Double-breasted pieces of menswear
47 Trigger
49 Like Scrooge McDuck
50 Right-hand page of a book
51 Made muffs
52 John ___ Day (California commemoration)
53 Citrus refreshments
54 "N.Y. State of Mind" rapper
57 1994 Costner title role
58 Diva's time to shine
61 "Dune" genre
62 Mary or Elizabeth
63 Towering creature in "The Two Towers"
65 Sound in a cornfield
66 Half brother of Apollo
67 Christmas presence?
69 Sushi bar serving
70 Jazz great Fitzgerald
71 Along with "CODA" and "Argo," the only other four-letter Best Picture winner
72 Give gratis
73 Shakespearean shout
77 That's the spirit!
79 Strike defier
81 Part of an intersection
82 Barolos e Brunellos
83 Turn someone down
85 Unshared numbers
86 Hostile manner, informally
87 Actor and disability activist Christopher
88 Like some liquors
90 Org. regulating air quality
91 "You sure about that?"
94 Periods of 730 days
95 Withdraw from a union
97 Teensy amount
98 Feathered fliers
99 Shoe brand named for an antelope
100 Hybrid tennis bottoms
101 Second tries
103 *El Pollo* ____ (chicken chain)
105 Creditor's claim
106 Turkish money
111 Fad toy of 1996
113 Snowboarder's transport
115 Often-illegal turn, slangily
116 Cinephile's cable choice
117 Boars and bulls
119 Comedian Sedaris
120 *I*, to Augustus
121 Smudge or smear, say

PUZZLE BY DANIEL GRINBERG / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ THE NEW YORK TIMES

Solution to puzzle of August 22-23

RAD PHDS FLIRT SHARK
EMIL LAIN RAWER PHASE II
DOVE ACE SAVE DISACEARNED
TEENSY CPAS CLIMPS EELS
ABRAHAMLINCOLN ICAMES
GATOR CANTOR SNIP DUB
LASSI ASCETIC THETA
USMINT MAC GOTIN ELDER
STINKUP LIED ROT WSJ
EEK NARC ADELE ITALIA
ONEATTWOATHOTCROSSBUNS
NOSALE BPI US ASHE NAT
NOD BOA EOS HOWLANE
ASADA SINN REC FAIRER
CCLEF KNEEING OHFUN
SIP ELLIS SEANCE GETAT
ACRID THEUNIONSHIELD
SASH BODHI RICO ANTEUP
PUTINYOURTWOCENTS EMMA
UTOPIA LEMON NEOS MENS
NORSE LEEKS EDGY DIS

Solution to puzzle of August 22-23



PHOTOGRAPHS VIA APPLE TV

How scientific is the sci-fi of 'Dark Matter'?

Physicists see proven concepts combined with a lot of poetic license

BY CONNIE CHANG

"I had the image of a box in a warehouse, with a door on it. And that was it."

It was 2014, and Blake Crouch was brainstorming ideas for a new novel, having just published the final book in his mystery-thriller trilogy, "Wayward Pines."

He had spent nearly a decade circling quantum mechanics — a branch of physics typically used to describe the behavior of very small particles — waiting for the right story to hitch it to.

"I get interested in a topic," he said in a recent video interview. "That's how it starts."

In the resulting novel, "Dark Matter" (2016) — and in the Apple TV series Crouch subsequently created and runs — that box became the central device. Inside it, a person can be put into a state of quantum superposition: an idea rooted in real science, based on the non-intuitive concept that subatomic particles like electrons can, on some level, exist in two places at once.

The speculative leap? You can enter this seemingly indestructible box and exit into an alternate reality in which another version of you went down a different path — a notion rooted in the "many worlds" theory first proposed by Hugh Everett, a physicist.

"The best interactions between the pure science and the drama requires some compromise," said the Apple show's science consultant, Clifford V. Johnson, a physics professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Box, he continued, "is a completely fictional device that I think helps connect those two worlds."

How much does the science fiction in "Dark Matter" reflect science fact? In the series's second season, which began on Friday, viewers may again be prompted to wonder. As a physicist by training, I've had some inklings of my own, but I wanted to learn more from the show's makers and from scientists outside the production.

As befits a show steeped in quantum physics, the answers were sometimes complicated. And Season 2, which takes the series off-book, presented a set of scientific challenges not previously hashed out for the novel — to say nothing of their having to all be met visually.

Crouch and his creative partner and wife, Jacquelyn Ben-Zekry, who produces and co-writes the series, found themselves in uncharted territory.

"We really were staring at a blank page coming out of Season 1," Crouch said. "But we had the characters," he added. "And we knew what our actors could do, and what we wanted to write toward."

Crouch's relationship with Johnson goes back to 2015, when he asked the professor to look over parts of the "Dark Matter" novel. Crouch had written a few drafts, and he shared only "sciencey chunks of the book that had jargon," he said. The partnership grew closer over time.

"He reads every script that we write," Crouch said of Johnson's role.

Season 1 follows the book closely, telling the story of Jason Dessen (Joel Edgerton), a college professor whose world-hopping doppelgänger (also Edgerton) invents the Box and steals the original Jason's life, stranding him in the multiverse. By the end — spoilers follow — he is reunited with his wife, Daniela (Jennifer Connelly), and their son, Charlie (Oakes Fegley), all three about to step into a new world.

In dramatic terms, Season 1 is fundamentally a story about love and choice. Daniela's life implodes because of choices made by one Jason or the other; nevertheless, Daniela continues to choose her family.

"A lot of the show is about people wishing for other paths we could take, and she's someone who's really committed to the path that she's on in her marriage," Connelly said of her character, adding: "She's going to fight really hard to stay in it."

As for the science, the scientists I interviewed agreed that the basic premise draws from sound theory. By putting an object in total isolation — which means sealing it off from all interference, including errant vibrations, stray light and cosmic rays — scientists can indeed preserve an object's "quantum-ness," as Johnson described it, and keep it in a state of superposition.

"You cannot actually isolate a human being from their environment."

But the objects in those experiments are typically small molecules or atoms. Superposition is also used in quantum computers to manipulate information in ways classical computers can't, but the scale is still microscopic. Extrapolating to the size and complexity of humans represents "an idealized, human-scale version of something that is routinely explored in science labs," Johnson said.

In other words: For now, it lies outside the range of possibility as to be virtually impossible.

"As a practical matter, you cannot actually isolate a human being from their environment," Sean Carroll, a physicist at Johns Hopkins and the Santa Fe Institute, wrote by email. Referring to infrared light, he continued, "Just by breathing and radiating IR light, any macroscopic organism creates their own environment." (He added: "But I am very forgiving when it comes to TV show science!")

In Season 2, Jason realizes that understanding the Box is crucial to keeping his family safe. But that means disassembling and examining the Box itself — which in Season 1 was a black box, as it were. Fortunately for Crouch, Johnson had already been thinking about that.

Task in hand, Johnson waded into "a lot of really, really fun contemporary science," he said. To shut out all potential interference, for example, the Box has to adapt to changing conditions. Think noise-canceling headphones, which generate countersignals to neutralize incoming sound, but supercharged.

In an early Season 2 episode, Jason dismantles the Box down to its studs, exposing layers of circuitry, coaxial cables and glowing panels. The details had to be convincing. For inspiration, members of the special-effects and production-design crews pulled images of the interiors of quantum computers and other cutting-edge tech, "like some of the stuff coming out of SpaceX, Blue Origin and NASA," Ben-Zekry said.

But dismantling the Box raised another question: If the Box is nearly indestructible, how does Jason remove the exterior panels? "That was a question that Matt Cavaliero in props was asking me every day for like a month," Ben-Zekry said. "Patricio Farrell, our production designer, too."

To puzzle it out, Ben-Zekry enlisted the help of the show's sound engineer, Cormac Funge. The solution, at least in the world of "Dark Matter," involved electromagnets and their faint, resonant hum.

No amount of design ingenuity, however, could make such a box function in the real world. For starters, any object with energy, like a human being, interacts gravitationally with whatever is around it. A massive box would add more matter to interact with.

"If you want to isolate people from the universe so that they can maintain quantum superposition for longer, I think surrounding them with something really, really, really dense and heavy isn't great," said John Joseph Carrasco, a physics professor at Northwestern University.

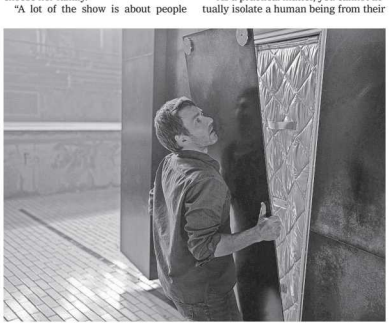
Where Season 1 was about navigating your way home, Season 2 emphasizes the bonds that tether us to one another. The creators leaned on another concept lifted from quantum mechanics, entanglement, which says that seemingly disconnected parts of a system can be connected, sometimes over great distances.

As with superposition, entanglement applies typically to very small objects. But the show extends it to the Boxes, the worlds and even the characters.

No evidence suggests such connections are possible. For Edgerton, who acknowledged that his grasp of the science was nothing like his character's, that hardly seemed to matter. The show is science *fiction*: Its use of entanglement, he said, is a beautiful example of magic realism.

The idea "that two people that deeply love each other are somehow intertwined, enmeshed, no matter which universe you meet them in — I think that comes from a heart place rather than a scientific journal," he said.

Above, the giant box that acts as a de facto portal to other worlds partly disassembled in Season 2 of "Dark Matter." From far left, Oakes Fegley, Joel Edgerton and Jennifer Connelly as the reunited Dessen family.



Below, Blake Crouch, who oversees "Dark Matter" and wrote the 2016 novel, with his wife and creative partner, Jacquelyn Ben-Zekry. Below left, Edgerton in Season 2.

When worse follows better

Unimaginable sadness can lay you low. But comfort can exceed your imagination.

Modern Love

BY KATE GORDON

BRIAN REA

When my husband and I read our wedding vows nearly four years ago, he said, "I vow to make you coffee every morning for the rest of our lives."

And he has. If we're traveling, he finds a coffee shop. If we're at home, he makes it himself and sets it on my night stand without saying a word. He even did it the morning after my mother killed herself.

The first time we met, at an awkward cocktail gathering of incoming Wharton School students, he said, "I'm Matt, but my friends call me Gordo."

He was attracted to my confidence and willingness to stir the pot. I was drawn to his sense of humor, kindness and drive. We fell in love quickly, went through business school together and then moved across the country to San Francisco. We drank too much bourbon on Fridays, slept in too late on Saturdays and made fried egg sandwiches on Sundays. Life in those days was all about the two of us.

Until we got our dog, Bruce, who was defiant and energetic — the perfect preparation for parenthood. And soon we moved 30 miles south to the suburbs and had our son, Wes. Gordo stepped into the role of father easily, while never failing to bring me coffee.

When you get married, you promise "for better or worse," and "in good times and bad," but we didn't realize how soon the bad times would hit. While most of our friends reveled in their blissful newlywed stage, we were thrown into the trenches. Before our son turned seven months old, my mother killed herself in her garage.

My mother was a powerhouse real estate broker in the Bay Area with a zest for life. We were the mother-daughter duo that spoke every day and jointly hosted a birthday party when I turned 25 and she turned 50. We looked like mirror images of each other except she was four inches shorter and always impeccably dressed.

Around the time Wes was born, she began to struggle, and I, her only child, along with our extended family, began to worry about her. I did the best I could, managing her needs along with those of my growing family and career. Right before she died, she had seemed to rebound, to the relief of everyone who loved her. Of course, now I know that kind of rebound can be typical just before someone takes their own life.

Losing her meant losing the one person who had gotten me through every hard moment of my life. Yet Gordo was there for me.

One night after Wes was asleep, as I waited for the shower to warm up, I collapsed on the bathroom floor, my sobs so loud I couldn't hear the shower. If pain were a sound, this was it. Gordo rushed in and held me silently.

He knew the choreography of my grief before I did — how on some nights I needed to talk in circles and on others I needed to watch TV and say nothing at all. He knew when to rub my back and how to handle my grief bursts and panic attacks, when to order pizza or burritos.

In those early weeks and months, we would go on walks with Wes and Bruce. On one walk, I was agonizing about how hard this all was and how unlucky I felt when he said, "You are not special," which was a line from one of my mother's favorite shows, one she used to say to me often.

I laughed. He always knows when to drop a joke.

"Is there anything I can do to make it easier?" he then asked.

We worked best as a team. Yet he was holding up our world by himself.

In our marriage, I was the one who had kept life on track. I ran our household. Yet after my mother died, all I could manage was getting out of bed and breastfeeding Wes. While also handling his new job, Gordo took on everything else: grocery shopping, dinner planning, doctors' appointments, dog care. He didn't complain. He did them all silently, as if they always had been his responsibility.

"Go shower," he would say. "I've got dinner."

"I love you," I would say.

I would go straight from the shower to the couch. I had no words or energy for anything else; I had used it up being present for Wes.

As the TV played, I could hear the kitchen cacophony in the other room — the roasting pan landing on the stovetop, the salad tongs hitting the metal bowl, the sink turning on and off. I wanted to help but couldn't.

My guilt grew — this time not for failing as a daughter or a mother, but as a wife. This wasn't the marriage I promised. This wasn't the version of me I promised. We worked best as a team, dividing and conquering. Yet here he was, holding up our entire world himself. And I was watching from the couch.

A little later, Gordo brought me dinner, setting up the dinner trays we had for TV nights, filling up my water, laying out a fresh cloth napkin and delivering a hot plate of food. I started to eat, wanting the salt and the peri-peri sauce we liked with our chicken, but I kept quiet, not wanting to ask for something else. A moment later, Gordo appeared with both.

"Thank you so much," I said, trying to hold back tears. "I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," he said as he kissed my forehead. He sat down next to me and started eating.

After we were done, he took the plates into the kitchen and started cleaning. No requests for me, no asks for help. I heard him loading the dishwasher and scrubbing pans. After the dishwasher started, I heard the hiss of the spray bottle as he wiped down the counters. He not only was cleaning up but doing it to my standards.

When we got the suicide note from the coroner, I could tell Gordo was on edge. At first, I figured it was because he had just gone to pick up a suicide note left for his wife, an errand bizarre enough to unnerve anyone. But before coming home, he'd read it and saw that it lacked what we naïvely had assumed a suicide note would include — some reassurance that it wasn't my fault. Instead, it said she'd been feeling distant from us.

"I can't believe she wrote those words to you," he said. "It's so unfair."

He was trying not to criticize the woman I loved more than anyone when she clearly had been sick and suffering, and I appreciated that. Yet it also felt good to have him not just share my sadness but my anger. I wasn't alone in my guilt and fury.

Outside of that, I rarely saw his anger, grief or fear. He bottled up his emotions, knowing I couldn't take them on. He buried his own grief so mine could have the space it needed. And still, I was terrified.

I kept waiting for cracks to form in our marriage and for the morning coffee to stop coming, because losing her had made me ugly. I was opinionated and high maintenance before my mother died. After, I became someone I didn't recognize — reactive, vicious, unreachable. One night, I said something cruel in the way grief can make you cruel, and I watched his face, waiting for him to tell me it was too much. That I was too much. Instead, he pulled me close.

What I eventually came to believe is that my mother knew our marriage would hold, even if I didn't. My mother thought the world of Gordo. We always used to joke that she liked him more than me. In her speech at our wedding, she said, "I adore you, Matthew Gordon."

She trusted one thing above all else: that Gordo loved me deeply and knew how to stay. I believe she took comfort in this toward the end. That he would get me through it. That he would stay when she couldn't.

Less than 24 hours after my mother killed herself, I woke to get Wes. He smiled at me, unaware of what we both had lost. I picked him up, feeling the weight of his body in my arms. I changed his diaper, brought him into bed and started to breastfeed. As I stared at him and ran my hands through his tufts of hair, Gordo walked in with my coffee, set it on my night stand and kissed my forehead.

He has kept every promise she couldn't.

Kate Gordon is a technology executive in San Mateo, Calif.

If you are having thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or go to SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources for a list of additional resources.

One of my sisters has spurned our parents. What am I to do?

The Ethicist

BY KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

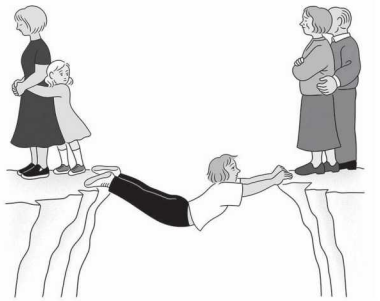
I am one of four adult sisters. Over the years, each of us has developed a somewhat strained relationship with our parents, though to varying degrees.

Our parents provided for us materially and were not abusive. Looking back, however, I think there may have been some emotional neglect. Whether that is the root cause or part of a broader pattern, my sisters and I have grown quite different from our parents in our values and outlook. We disagree on politics, religion, abortion, L.G.B.T.Q. rights, money and much else. I remain cordial with my parents, but we are not particularly close.

One of my sisters has gone much further and decided to have no contact with them. She has a young daughter, my parents' only grandchild. The estrangement has been deeply painful for my parents, who frequently ask what they can do to repair the relationship. My sister, meanwhile, is firm in her decision and wants support from others rather than pressure to reconcile.

I find myself caught in the middle. I care about everyone involved. I sympathize with my parents' sadness and confusion, but I also respect my sister's right to set boundaries and decide whom she has relationships with. I do not want to become a mediator or messenger, yet the two sides seem to look to me for guidance.

What obligations, if any, do I have here? Is it ethical simply to maintain separate relationships with each side? Or do I owe something more to my parents, my sister or my niece because I may be one of the few remaining connections among them? How should I balance compassion for my grieving parents with respect for my sister's autonomy? Name Withheld



TOMI UM

I'M SORRY YOU find yourself in this situation. Family estrangement of the sort you describe has become sadly familiar over the past decade or so. The strategy of severing all ties with one's parents has been encouraged by certain high-profile therapists, and now Reddit, TikTok and Facebook bristle with supportive "estranged adult child" testimonials and tips. Nor is the therapeutic context accidental: The therapist's professional obligations are primarily directed toward the client, rather than toward other people in the client's life. A family friend who knows everyone involved may have sympathy for the parents as well as the child; the parents, however flawed, are fully real to that person.

It's not that most therapists encourage all-or-nothing approaches to family ties. Far from it. But, to paint with a broad brush, therapeutic culture has tended to expand, sometimes recklessly, what qualifies as abuse or harm. In an earlier era, the complete severing of family ties seemed to be justified only by extreme circumstances, such as physical or sexual abuse, severe addiction and the like. Today the adult child going no-contact may speak of not feeling "seen" or of parents who weren't "emotionally present," failed to "respect boundaries" or were "controlling." Sometimes the grounds — "narcissistic abuse," some generalized "toxicity" — sound alarming but are so amorphous that they can be neither refuted nor verified. All these complaints can arise from genuinely damaging relationships. They can also describe ordinary parental shortcomings.

To be clear, nobody is required to remain in a seriously abusive relationship just because the abuser is a parent. But we should pause at the premise that total, you're-dead-to-me estrangement (not just keeping your distance) is justified simply because continued contact makes someone less happy. A familiar "Cat's in the Cradle" asymmetry may help explain why the adult child tends to be the one to sever ties and the aging parent the one to lament it; for the adult child, the relationship may no longer be central in the way that it typically remains for the parent. "I need to choose myself," "I need to protect my peace": However sincere, these sentiments can coexist with less edifying, more punitive ones. Parental suffering isn't necessarily a regrettable side effect. In some cases, it's part of the point.

All of which puts you in a difficult position. If you don't want to be a mediator, that's your prerogative. A therapist might even say it's wise. But you do need to tell your sister and your parents that this is your stance. Make sure everybody involved understands that you respect your sister's right to her decision and have compassion for your parents' suffering. You're not going to campaign for reconciliation or carry messages between them. Nor should you pretend that you think your sister's decision was justified.

Still, I'm not a therapist, and I'm inclined to think your parents' grief should be given weight alongside your sister's grievance. So I don't believe you would be out of order to ask, just once, if they would all be willing to meet with a family counselor. The counselor could help them decide whether it would help to include you. If so, your participation might assist people you love in reaching some kind of resolution with one another. I say *might*. I should confess that I'm not optimistic. No-contact culture has developed deft rejoinders to almost every effort at reconciliation. All the same, you have to live with this estrangement, too, and some of the pain it has caused is yours.

There is a woman in our mahjong group of 15 who is now nearly blind and a very slow player. She uses accommodations, such as a card with large print, oversize tiles and a magnifying glass with a light. We've all been together for years, but the situation is worsening. Despite these accommodations, she remains agonizingly slow. Her table plays half as many games as the others. Many members refuse to play with her or complain privately afterward. How do we gently tell her she is no longer welcome? We're kind people; no one wants to hurt her, but we play to relax and challenge ourselves, and this situation no longer allows that. Name Withheld

A VILLAGER PUTS his infirm father into a basket and starts dragging him off with the intention of abandoning him in the woods. The man's young son asks him to bring the basket back: "That way, I'll have it at hand when it's time to drag you off." The man is chastened and reverses course.

Such tales are found throughout Asia and beyond. My point, of course, is that the agonizingly slow woman may be you, some years hence. To be sure, mahjong is meant to be fun, and that requires proceeding at a reasonable pace. It's clearly a problem that your friend is so slow. But the respectful way to address it isn't to complain behind her back or conspire to eject her; it's to talk with her. Treat her, in short, as you would want to be treated should you find yourself in her position.

She is presumably coming along, like all of you, for the company as well as the game. You could agree on a time limit for turns, with the understanding that she may sometimes have to sit out the rest of a hand. Other compromises may suggest themselves: Some evenings could allow for slower play; one table could agree to play fewer games; she may have ideas for further accommodations herself. Any workable arrangement, though, begins with being honest with her about the situation. And someday you may be glad that nobody was too quick to reach for the basket.

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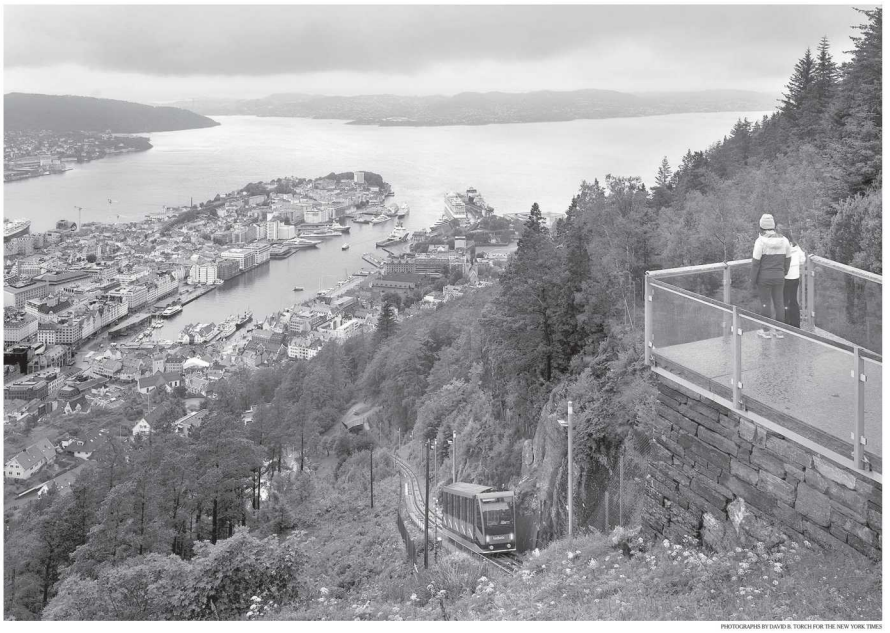
Traverse mountains and fjords

On the west coast of Norway, explore a historical port city and UNESCO site



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID B. TORCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

36 Hours in . . .
Bergen, Norway

BY LYNSEY CHUTEL
AND DAVID B. TORCH

Landing at Bergen airport, travelers are met with the rain — and a bright-yellow, billboard-size question: "Bergen?" Erected in 2017 to inaugurate a new terminal, the ambiguously punctuated artwork is almost existential. A trade port until the 1830s, Bergen still fancies itself a global city, and bristles at being overlooked for Oslo; a deliberate incubation of its cultural economy has yielded thriving culinary and art scenes that run the gamut from high art to heavy metal. While the city has in the last decade pushed for international tourism, it wants to welcome visitors on its own terms, including limiting the number of cruise ships that dock at its port each day. Beyond its old-world charm and innovative spirit, Bergen is distinguished by its environment. With verdant mountains and dramatic fjords, the city exemplifies Norway's porous boundary between the natural and the urban.

FRIDAY

1 P.M. | WANDER THE OLD WORLD

Bryggen, the historic town center, has been the starting point of a visit to Bergen since at least the 12th century, when merchants from the Hanseatic League, an association of Northern Europe's seafaring traders, lived and worked in the coastal city. About 60 original buildings have survived successive fires and World War II bombings and are recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Today, narrow wooden houses symbolize old Bergen, and the winding medieval passages and steep staircases still offer surprise for explorers. Like Galleri Fjalar, a space for independent Norwegian and international artists, on the second floor of one of these heritage buildings on the waterfront. Owned by Kristian Espedal, the former frontman of the Norwegian black metal band Gorgoroth, the gallery is cozy, though the art can be unsettling.

3 P.M. | SHOP FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE

Walk about 20 minutes west, to the opposite side of the port, to explore the Nordnes peninsula. Until the 17th century, the district of Nordnes — now a neighborhood with ocean-view parks — was known for witch trials. Along Strandgaten, local tastes and lovers of Scandinavian design are equally sated, thanks to wool suppliers, cycle outfitters and small independent spaces that are a collector's dream. Soccer fans, especially those who were converted to the beautiful game by Norway's run at this year's World Cup, can dig through a collection of vintage club and national kits at fdb.343 (from 499 kroner, or about $53). Or see how a family-run supplier of vintage and new Scandinavian lamps led to an easygoing in-house cocktail bar at Lampemannen.

5 P.M. | GO FOR A DIP AND A SAUNA

Continue west about 10 minutes until you reach the tip of the peninsula and Nordnes Park, where you can sit under the trees and look out over the bay. Need to cool down — or warm up? For at least a century, Bergensers have enjoyed the benefits of a cold-water swim in the outdoor Nordnes Seawater Pool, overlooking the sea. A dive into the frigid water is invigorating, but equally appealing is a dip in the 82-foot (25-meter) heated saltwater pool. Afterward, a sauna awaits with fantastic views of the city. The pool is open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the summer, and entrance costs 130 kroner for adults. There are changing rooms with hair dryers, but pack your own towel.

7 P.M. | EAT ON TREND

In a tiny kitchen, the young chefs who broke away from fine dining to open Tempo Tempo in late 2021 are exploring what it means to be Norwegian in the world, through global dishes reconceived with local ingredients. The vibe is buzzing, the décor is chaotic and the locals love it. Sit down to a tasting menu (895 kroner per person) starring Bergen's ubiquitous caviar on a potato flatbread, a sublime halibut tapenade in squid ink and carrots made lip-smacking with a chicken glaze. Go all-in on the fried ling, a take on the fish taco. The wine pairing, for double the price, prioritizes natural wines from southern Europe. Served alongside ice cream with miso caramel sauce, the Moscato d'Asti from Piedmont may change your mind about the sparkling sweet wine.

9:30 P.M. | CATCH A PEAK SUNSET

Take advantage of the late sunset — which during the summer, can be as late as 11 p.m. — from the top of Mount Fløyen. It's about a 10-minute walk from Tempo Tempo to the lower funicular station on Vetrlidsallmenningen, in the city center. The last trip leaves the top at around midnight (round-trip tickets, 200 kroner during the summer). At the end of a five-minute funicular ride is a panoramic view that dispels the feeling that this city of 300,000 is small. At the summit, come in from the wind at the Peisestuen Bar for a cocktail inspired by Norse mythology; named for the goddess of love, fertility and death, the Freya has Elsker Dry Pink Gin, yellow chartreuse, black currant, elderflower, lavender and oak (215 kroner).

Top: A view of Bergen from the top of Mount Fløyen is accessible by hiking or a five-minute funicular ride. From far left: the Norwegian sculptor Arnold Haukeland's "Red Wind" is on the grounds of Stenersen museum; Legal is an easygoing spot with a solid cocktail list and a 3 a.m. closing time; and a dish of cured wild halibut with olive tapenade, Norwegian tomatoes and fresh oregano is on offer at Tempo Tempo.

SATURDAY

10 A.M. | BUY SCANDI THREADS

Grab a skillingsbolle, Bergen's regional take on the Scandinavian cinnamon bun (54 kroner) and a coffee at Kaffemisjonen (the V60 pour-over, for 60 kroner, is worth the wait) then shop around. In the city center, Lot333 brings high-end independent labels to Bergen, like Copenhagen's Norse Projects and New York's 7115 by Szeki. Vrimmel boutique hews closer to home, stocking Norwegian brands like byTiMo, great for flowing printed dresses (from about 1,330 kroner), and trenches (from about 3,500 kroner) from the homegrown brand BRGN. If you can't resist a quintessentially Norwegian patterned knit, you may as well make it a vintage sweater from the cubbyhole boutique Slit 'an, which collects the official Dale of Norway sweaters designed for the country's Olympic ski teams (from 3,000 kroner).

NOON | EXPLORE MUSEUMS

Small, experimental galleries dot the city, but the four Kode art museums along the Lille Lungegardsvann lake remain the nucleus of Bergen's art scene. The jewelbox Rasmus Meyer museum has the world's third-largest collection of works by Edvard Munch, while the Stenersen displays modern art — "They Live," a retrospective of the photographer Vibeke Tandberg, runs through Sept. 12. Have lunch at the Landmark cafe inside the Bergen Kunsthall, an independent contemporary art museum on the same drag, or warm up with a hot chocolate from the Norwegian chocolatier Fjak on the ground-floor of the Stenersen gallery. A day pass (200 kroner) offers access to all seven Kode spaces — including Troldhaugen, the home of the composer Edvard Grieg, just outside the city, which in the summer hosts daily concerts (450 kroner, including a guided tour). The villa is currently closed for renovation, but the museum, cafe and garden remain open to visitors.

3 P.M. | SEE HOW VIKINGS SAILED

During the World Cup, featuring the internet's favorite Viking, Erling Haaland, Norway leaned hard into its seafaring history. Tap into the excitement at the Maritime Museum (160 kroner), where exhibits include fragments of centuries-old ships and a not-to-scale model of what the original conquering vessel might have looked like. Opened last year, the short but powerful Viking Ship exhibition, developed with the University Museum of Bergen, demonstrates how ships were not only a mode of transport, but a marker of status in life and death for prominent men and women of the era. Getting to the museum is part of the fun — from the Kode museums, it's a pleasant 10-minute walk through the University of Bergen's hillside gardens.

5 P.M. | HIT THE BEACH

Bergen has no sandy beaches, except for a human-made inlet on the old dockyards in Mohlenpris. That waterfront stretch is part of an effort to turn the old docks into a friendly residential neighborhood and university district, welcoming locals back into the city center. Here you'll find the Cornerteateret, a theater complex that every September hosts the annual Bergen Fringe Festival for performing arts, as well as the city's largest urban park, Nygardsparken, whose construction was part of a revitalization project that began 20 years ago. As the area transforms, upstart businesses have moved in, like the cafe Nobel Bopel, where a delightfully simple yet generous cheese and apple jam sandwich costs 86 kroner.

8 P.M. | FIND BERGEN'S FLAVOR

At Lysverket, the restaurant where in 2013 he first pioneered neo-fjordic cuisine, the chef Christopher Haatuft has downshifted with a more relaxed — though no less creative — à la carte menu. Start with his take on the classic Bergen fish soup (from 349 kroner) or the bacon waffle with snow crab (299 kroner). The dry-aged grilled beef with dirty rice (2,199 kroner) is perfect for sharing among friends. For something even more casual, Lysverket's sister restaurant, the punk-inspired Hoggorm, bucks convention with its unfussy yet inventive takes on pizza, paired with a quality wine list. The wild shrimp and bisque pizza (320 kroner) celebrates Bergen's seafood while the bacon and pineapple pizza (300 kroner) will make you reconsider the pairing. Throw in a side of oysters (60 kroner each) for a very Bergen buffet.

10 P.M. | DANCE IN UNUSUAL SPACES

Some of the city's best music venues are less than a mile from the city center in Verftet, Bergen's old fish canning district. USF Verftet, a concert and exhibition hall that takes its name from the old United Sardine Factory, hosts live gigs and festivals. On the same once-abandoned lot is Rommet, a venue created by Bergen's recent graduates; in a nod to the building's origins, a boat's pulley is used to drag a giant curtain that transforms the space from an intimate bar into a cavernous dance hall. Have a drink at the bar, or buy tickets to the band or D.J. set on that night (price varying). Back in the city center, Landmark cafe transforms on Saturday nights into a club (from 300 kroner). And around the corner on the Nygardsgaten, Legal is an easygoing hole-in-the-wall with a solid cocktail list and a 3 a.m. closing time.

SUNDAY

10 A.M. | CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

Bergen is surrounded by seven peaks, all offering sublime views of the city and its fjords. Mount Ulriken, seven miles southwest of the city center, is the highest of the bunch. But east of the city, it's a relatively breezy two-hour climb to the top of the 1,565-foot Mount Lovstakken, thanks to a recently erected footbridge on the Lovstien trail. From the city center, take a 20-minute ride on the No. 10 bus to Kristian Bings Vei, a stop that is about 10 minutes from the new footbridge. If you'd like to do the whole trail, or a longer route that also takes you past a recently built lookout, take the No. 19 bus to Melkeplassen. Both stops are in residential areas, so be mindful.

1 P.M. | WAVE FROM THE WATER

A fjord cruise is a lovely way to bid farewell to Bergen. The most popular ones sail down the Mostraumen strait, outside of Bergen, with a round-trip lasting about three and a half hours. There are several operators with different summer departure times and pricing; experiences range from luxury, with lunch served, to a fjord safari on an inflatable (but sturdy) boat (from 740 kroner). Short on time? Take the Beffen like a local. A charming little ferry that has operated since 1894, the Beffen sails around the port during the summer, with stops that include the Bergen Aquarium and the Old Bergen Museum. You can hop on and off at each stop or stay onboard and enjoy the city from the water (300 kroner).

KEY STOPS

Bryggen, the medieval heart of old Bergen, with its wooden buildings and narrow alleys, is a must-see that gave the city its character centuries ago.

Art is everywhere here, so keep a lookout for small experimental galleries as you walk around the city. The **Kode** museums are home to varying eras and genres.

With seven mountains, there are spectacular views all around. Take a **funicular** or **cable car** — or a hike — to the top of one.

WHERE TO EAT

Eat in an art gallery at **Landmark**, a cafe inside the Bergen Kunsthall.

Treat yourself while warming up from the incessant rain with a hot chocolate from **Fjak**, on the ground floor of the Stenersen Kode museum.

Eat like a local with a casual lunch at **Nobel Bopel**, in the charming Møhlenpris neighborhood.

For dinner, head to the buzzy bistro **Tempo Tempo** in the city center, where young chefs are playing with global flavors and Norwegian staples.

The toppings at **Hoggorm** (bonito flakes and mushroom; bacon and pineapple) are a bit like this heavy metal-inspired pizzeria's décor: rebellious, plain-spoken and a little zany.

Discover Michelin-starred neo-fjordic cuisine at **Lysverket**, where a new à la carte menu makes the white-tablecloth venue feel a little more approachable.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Charmante Skosredet Hotel** has 41 splashy rooms that evoke 20th-century Paris with distinctive patterned wallpaper, and a brasserie where Norwegian sustainability underpins French cooking. Rooms from about 5,300 kroner, or about $558, a night.

Villa Terminus is a boutique hotel in a baroque residence that dates back to 1796. It is centrally located near the train station, and rooms start at 3,469 kroner a night.

The **Scandic hotel chain** has eight locations in Bergen, with rooms ranging from 3,288 kroner for a standard double at the **Scandic Torget**, in the heart of the city, to 2,913 at **Scandic Byparken**, in the theater and gallery district.

Like many cities, Bergen is debating whether to limit the number of **short-term rentals** available in the city. Neighborhoods like **Nosted** on the Nordnes peninsula offer options in convenient locations.

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